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282

LOOK WHO'S BACK!

DOCTOR WHO

"It'll be a massively different show"

EXCLUSIVE! Steven Moffat and Peter Capaldi talk Christmas special, superheroes and the new series

PASSENGERS

Jennifer Lawrence and Chris Pratt get lost in space

PLUS!

GIANT 2017 PREVIEW

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DIRK GENTLY • THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE • STAR-LORD • CHRISTOPHER LLOYD • THE MUMMY
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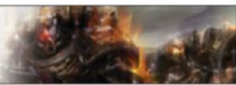
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Rants & Raves

SFX'S HIGHLIGHTS OF 2016

RICHARD EDWARDS EDITOR

HIGHLIGHTS
→ *Captain America: Civil War* was the movie standout. TV was where the real action was at, with *Game Of Thrones* back on form, and *Stranger Things* my favourite thing this year.
LOWLIGHTS
→ *Dawn Of Justice*, *Suicide Squad* and *X-Men: Apocalypse* were all massive disappointments.



NICK SETCHFIELD FEATURES EDITOR

HIGHLIGHTS
→ *The Witch* was the greatest thing on screen this year. A masterclass in dread that's made me very excited for what director Robert Eggers does next.
LOWLIGHTS
→ Disappointed by *Luke Cage* – great cast, but the story dragged like the cops searching the Hudson for a body.



IAN BERRIMAN REVIEWS EDITOR

HIGHLIGHTS
→ TV-wise it's been all about Netflix this year: *Black Mirror*, *Luke Cage*, *Stranger Things* – all great. Film-wise I loved *10 Cloverfield Lane* and *The Witch*.
LOWLIGHTS
→ Most tentpole movie releases were mediocre (with *Civil War* best of a bad bunch). Fingers crossed for *Rogue One*...



JOSH WINNING NEWS EDITOR

HIGHLIGHTS
→ Amazing TV, obv's (*Supergirl*, *Westworld*, *Stranger Things*), and some surprise big-screen belters (*Arrival*, *Under The Shadow*, *Deadpool*, *Lights Out*).
LOWLIGHTS
→ Bryan Singer bowed out of the X-verse with a whimper (*X-Men: Apocalypse*), and *ID: Resurgence* felt like a wasted opportunity.



RUSSELL LEWIN PRODUCTION EDITOR

HIGHLIGHTS
→ All my favourite films were non-genre, but *Deadpool* would be my pick of SFX fodder. (I guess I can't have *Ethel & Ernest*...) → Hope *Rogue One*'s in this list.
LOWLIGHTS
→ I fear I'm tiring of superhero films. Which is unfortunate. → Couldn't do more than two episodes of *Class*.



JONATHAN COATES ART EDITOR

HIGHLIGHTS
→ For an '80s fanboy *Stranger Things* was a retro-inspired joy which seemed to appear from nowhere. → Has been great to have *Red Dwarf* back on our screens and back on form.
LOWLIGHTS
→ *X-Men: Apocalypse* was a massive disappointment after the excellent *Days Of Future Past*.



CLIFF NEWMAN ART EDITOR

HIGHLIGHTS
→ Ryan Reynolds as *Deadpool*... The man was born to play that role! → "Battle Of The Bastards" in *Game Of Thrones* was bloody epic. → I loved everything about *Stranger Things*.
LOWLIGHTS
→ Brexit, Trump, Bowie, Prince, Rickman and *Suicide Squad*.



WILL SALMON SPECIALS EDITOR

HIGHLIGHTS
→ *Red Dwarf XI* was a delightful surprise. Properly smart and funny. → *The Greasy Strangler* was a delirious treat, fantastic in every sense.
LOWLIGHTS
→ *Suicide Squad* is a masterclass in how not to make a film. A rotten, boring, unstructured mess. I quite liked Leto though.



TARA BENNETT US EDITOR

HIGHLIGHTS
→ Hopefully, *Arrival*'s success bodes well for the future development of intelligent, emotional sci-fi.
LOWLIGHTS
→ Can Johnny Depp retire from "acting" so he can detox from his make-up and mugging rut? And can people stop whinging about trailers and casting until they've seen the damn movie?



JOSEPH McCABE US EDITOR

HIGHLIGHTS
→ Most of this year's franchise films were meh. Thankfully, the non-franchise *Arrival* saved 2016 as this year's best SF movie.
LOWLIGHTS
→ *Star Trek*'s 50th anniversary proved a largely forgettable one. The most important SF TV series ever deserved a smarter tribute than *Star Trek Beyond*.



As the year that brought us Brexit and President Trump comes to an end – a year where real-life has been as bizarre as anything in sci-fi – the Doctor is poised to make his belated first proper appearance of 2016*. Considering he's spent a few millennia wandering space and time, there's probably something very "seen it all before" about Planet Earth taking a turn for the weird this year, so hopefully it'll be the last thing on his mind in this year's *Doctor Who* Christmas special. We went on set, chatted with the cast and nabbed an exclusive interview with *Who* showrunner Steven Moffat as he prepares to enter his final year at the helm (p42).

We're also looking ahead to the next 12 months in the science fiction multiverse. Our Giant 2017 Preview tells you about the movies, TV, books and comics that have to be on your radar next year. With *Wonder Woman*, *Blade Runner 2049*, *Guardians Vol 2* and the small matter of *Star Wars: Episode VIII* heading for the big screen – as well as the returns of *Game Of Thrones* and *Stranger Things* on the telly – we're pretty confident it'll surpass a disappointing 2016.

Most importantly, I'd like to wish you a wonderful Christmas and new year from everyone here at SFX. If you're short of ideas for a Christmas present, why not buy an SFX subscription for a loved one – or even yourself... Details on p40.



Rich

Richard Edwards, Editor
@RichDEdwards

* Aside from that *Class* cameo.



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ON-SET EXCLUSIVE

A NEW SPIN

Burning rubber on the set of
Monster Trucks with Lucas Till,
Danny Glover and Chris Wedge...



"I go to see the *Fast & Furious* movies with my friends every year at midnight screenings," Lucas Till tells Red Alert. "This is kind of my own version of that. It's super sweet and it's a lot of fun." No stranger to full-throttle sci-fi, the actor who played Havok/Alex Summers in the *X-Men* prequels enters a whole new world of weird with *Monster Trucks*, a coming-of-ager-on-wheels that makes *Transformers* look like *Hot Wheels On Ice*. →

Highlights



12 GREAT BALLS OF FIRE

→ Balancing the scales on Sky 1's festive fantasy *The Last Dragon Slayer*.



18 THE WONDER YEARS

→ Leigh Bardugo talks penning her YA *Wonder Woman* novel.



23 RISE OF THE GUARDIAN

→ Star-Lord touches down on Earth in his own solo comic series.

SCI-FACT! Car coordinator Tyler Gaisford also drove Commissioner Gordon's wheels in *The Dark Knight*.

It's June 2014 and Red Alert is on the British Columbia set of Paramount's Next Big Thing. *Monster Trucks* has been shooting here for three months, and today we're at a Volvo dealership (ideally situated next to a busy highway), where we find Till and his co-stars getting their hands grubby in a garage. "I grew up with a truck, my dad had one, so I like trucks," Till says in-between fiddling with a 1956 Dodge during a scene with Jane Levy (*Evil Dead*). "I'm thinking about getting one, maybe after this movie."

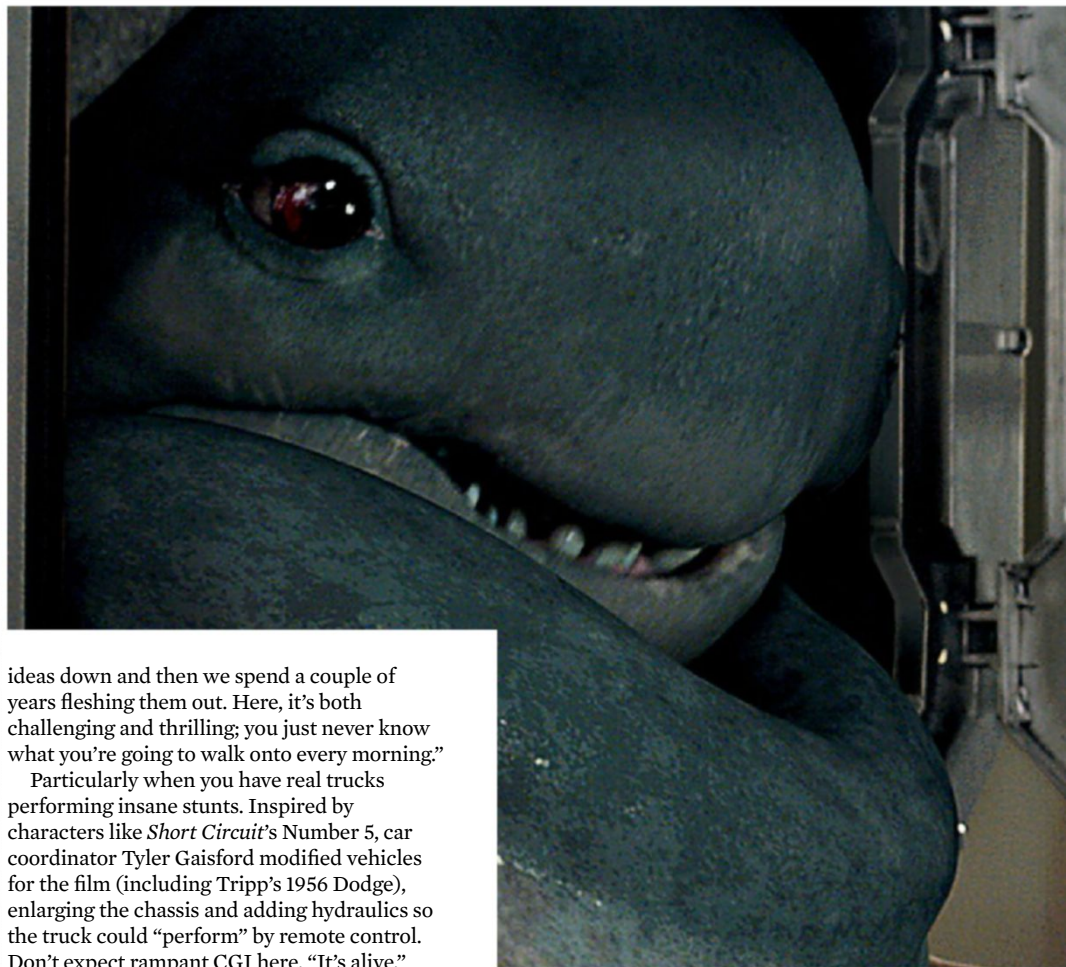
It's unlikely his truck will be quite like the one he fixes up in the film, though. In true pulpy sci-fi fashion, *Monster Trucks* sees his Dodge becoming "possessed" by a tentacular subterranean creature that emerges from its underground home when it's destroyed by evil frackers. Though it looks like a cross between a whale and something from deep space, the friendly fiend enters the life of 17-year-old loner Tripp (Till) at the precise moment he's looking for some excitement – and he gets it in spades.

Directed by Chris Wedge and written by *Jurassic World* scribe Derek Connolly (who's currently scripting *Star Wars: Episode IX*), *Monster Trucks* is, according to Wedge, a "fantastic, big story laced with character", adding that it's similar in tone to family classics *The Iron Giant* and *ET*. "Teenagers are a lot more complex than we give them credit for," he muses. "They have a lot of the emotional awareness that we have, they just don't have the experience that older people have, so they're trying everything."

Central to the film is the father-son relationship between Tripp and wheelchair-bound salvage yard owner Wethers, played by *Lethal Weapon* legend Danny Glover. Glover reveals: "Wethers provides space for Tripp... for the development of his imagination. Imagine a salvage yard, what opportunities you have to play with old things; playing with things that are wrecked or torn apart and having to put them together. It's kind of a metaphor for life in some sort of way."

Therein lies *Monster Truck*'s purring heart, because although it's pumped full of action and weird creatures, it's also about a young man attempting to find his place in the world. "I think I understand a little about Tripp," says Wedge, who has a teenage son himself and aged the character up for the movie (Tripp was originally much younger). More pivotally, Wedge faced his own filmmaking challenges with *Monster Trucks*, which marks his live-action debut after his animated hits *Ice Age*, *Robots* and *Epic*.

"It goes much faster than animation," Wedge reveals of live-action. "I've been away from home for six months; that's been difficult. The shooting is very gruelling and all the parts are moving all the time. In animation, we lock the



ideas down and then we spend a couple of years fleshing them out. Here, it's both challenging and thrilling; you just never know what you're going to walk onto every morning."

Particularly when you have real trucks performing insane stunts. Inspired by characters like *Short Circuit*'s Number 5, car coordinator Tyler Gaisford modified vehicles for the film (including Tripp's 1956 Dodge), enlarging the chassis and adding hydraulics so the truck could "perform" by remote control. Don't expect rampant CGI here. "It's alive," says Wedge of the truck. "But it's not squishy and animated. Its headlights don't blink; it moves like a truck that's aware. The creature, and the concept of how the creature fits with the truck, has been fun to figure out."

With Paramount already hard at work on a fifth *Transformers* film, you can bet the studio's eyeballing *Monster Trucks* as its next rubber-burning franchise. And with its blend of teen angst, timely environmental subtext and kick-ass action, the film looks set to succeed as a motorised coming-of-ager that harks back to '80s classics. "Imagine *Fast & Furious* 6, but with trucks," Wedge says. "That's what we're up to. You won't be disappointed, I promise. We've ruined about every one of the trucks we've created..."

Speaking of, you should probably expect the film's truck characters to feature on kids' Christmas lists for years to come. "They've got so much personality," laughs producer Mary Parent (next overseeing *Kong: Skull Island*). "Everybody wants one, whether you're a kid or an adult." Count us in... ●

Monster Trucks opens in cinemas on Monday 26 December.



Well that's one way to win a race.



A boy and his truck-monster.

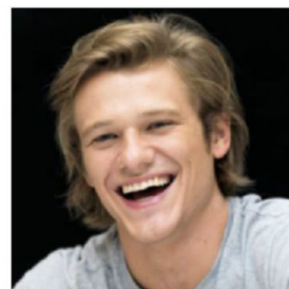


"Did I leave the gas on?"



MAXIMUM OVERDRIVE

Lucas Till talks monsters, family and being funny-scary...



WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT YOUR CHARACTER TRIPP?

→ It's a lot of fun to play a character who's... he's not an idiot by any means, but he's definitely unaware. He's really stressed out the whole time; the film takes place over two or three days and he's dealing with family drama and a giant creature in his car, so he's definitely unaware and has this Samwise Gamgee equivalent, Meredith, who's played by Jane Levy. It's fun to play a hero who doesn't know everything.

IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'VE HAD A GOOD TIME...

→ Past movies I've done I tried way too hard, and finally I was able to relax on this movie and realise that if I'm having fun then hopefully people watching will be having as much fun. We're trying to recreate the feeling of those movies [from the '80s] that were classics when I was younger. It's definitely got a lot of charm and we're having a great time making it. It's a laugh every day, all day every day. It's my first movie where I had to interact with something that's not there [the monster]. I was excited because sometimes I see actors do it really well and I see actors who don't do it really well, and I'm like, "I don't know if I'll be able to do it right." I liked the challenge.

IS IT A BIT OF A GENRE SPLICER? FUNNY BUT SCARY?

→ Yeah, there have been moments where I've been going for funny and Chris [Wedge, director] has been, like, "No you're supposed to be scared!" That's the whole point, it comes across as scary, but then you realise the things that were scary aren't any more, and then they become funny. It's a genre-splicer. It's funny, it's got a lot of heart and it's an action movie, too.

DOES THE MOVIE HAVE HIDDEN DEPTHS?

→ Yeah, there's a really big environmental message, because we find out this creature's a victim of oil tycoons. In the beginning, Tripp's a little more selfish in his goals because he's trying to get an engine for his truck, which is what the creature is, and as it goes along he befriends him and cares for him, tries to save him, finds that he has a family. That's all the creature's trying to do is get back to his family the whole time.

REX (1)

SCI-FACT! The dragon's ears are modelled after the director's dog: "They came from my collie as they seemed so expressive."

ACTOR AND DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

SLAY RIDE

Sky brings dodgy magic and a giant fire-breather to Christmas Day in *The Last Dragonslayer*...

➔ "It's perfect Christmas viewing," explains Jamie Stone, director of *The Last Dragonslayer*, when we ask him why we should tune in to see his TV movie on 25 December. "It'll genuinely appeal to all ages. It's funny, it's warm and it takes a bit of a bite at a few things. And it's got dragons and biscuits!"

Voiced by Richard E Grant, said dragon actually looks impressive given the TV-sized budget. "The script read like *Harry Potter*," Stone says, "and trying to do that on one-twentieth of the budget was challenging."

The comedy-drama has been adapted from Jasper Fforde's book by Tom Edge (also responsible for alarmingly-named comedy *Scrotal Recall*) and stars Ellise Chappell as the eponymous dragon-killer, a young girl who finds herself given the role in a greedy society that desperately wants the last dragon finished off so they can profit from taking its land. "Rather boldly for Christmas, it takes swipes at unthinking consumerism," chuckles Stone. "I think that's good."

Alongside Pauline Collins and John Bradley (Sam in *Game Of Thrones*), Ricky Tomlinson plays a wizard named Moobin whose powers aren't always reliable. In one sequence which seems to have been everybody's favourite to film (we can't imagine why), Moobin creates a self-replenishing biscuit tin that ends up shooting Custard Creams and Jammie Dodgers like a cannon. "There were biscuits going all over the place!" giggles Tomlinson.

This was the actor's first role in a film with heavy special effects, and he relished it. "Jamie showed me stuff on his phone – dragons and skeletons," he tells Red Alert. "It was a bit much for me because I'm 77 and I've only just learned to text, and he had me mesmerised. I said to him, 'You'll

have to direct me, as I haven't got a bloody clue!' There's one scene where we run outside the house and look up, and he said, 'Look towards the chimney pots and you're gonna see the dragon.' We're looking up, going, 'Oooh! Arrrrgh!' But when he showed that clip, it was unbelievable. The dragon is SENSATIONAL. I don't know how they do it. The kids are going to love it!"

He adds: "I've been very lucky being on television on Christmas Day with *The Royle Family* and I'm delighted to be on Christmas Day on this year. I would also

“The dragon is sensational – the kids are going to love it!”



take a gamble that this will only be the first of these *Dragonslayer* stories..."

Stone confirms that a second screenplay is underway, but a follow-up hasn't been greenlit yet. He adds that Fforde, who has written three *Dragonslayer* books to date, also visited the set. "It was pretty nerve-wracking for me," says the director. "But he said it was like someone had plugged into his head. The script and the book are different, but we've been faithful to the tone. I think Tom has done a good job of making it shootable. It's got a really irreverent fantasy tone that keeps undercutting what you'd expect of British fantasy in pleasing ways. There's an anarchic quality to the project, that a lot of films I like to watch at Christmas have: *Time Bandits*, *The Princess Bride*. It was the most enjoyable job I've ever done – a cool playground of a world to shoot in!"

The Last Dragonslayer will air on Christmas Day on Sky 1.



We'll miss Jim Royle but this'll help.

“DON'T QUOTE ME”

“IT FEELS UGLY AND BLASPHEMOUS AND EGOMANIACAL AND DISGUSTING FOR A FILMMAKER IN MY PLACE TO DO *NOSFERATU* NEXT. BUT THAT'S HOW FATE SHOOK OUT.”

Robert Eggers is as surprised he's remaking *Nosferatu* as us.

AERIAL ASSAULT

SCI-FI TV ROUND UP

→ **The Inhumans** has been greenlit as a TV series by ABC – its first two episodes will premiere in IMAX cinemas in September 2017.
 → Michael Green will oversee a TV adaptation of **Y: The Last Man** for FX. He will co-write the series with comic scribe Brian K Vaughan.
 → **Westworld** has been renewed for a second season by HBO – bodes well for Jon Nolan's five-year plan.
 → **Stranger Things** has been nominated for a Best Drama Critics Choice Award. Find out if it wins on 11 December.
 → **Supergirl** is set to clash with Cyborg Superman in a season two episode of the show.
 → **Legends Of Tomorrow** will enjoy a longer second season – it will run to 17 episodes this year.
 → Gabriel Luna confirms a **Ghost Rider** spin-off show has been “talked about”.
 → Syfy is adapting Robert A Heinlein's 1961 sci-fi novel **Stranger In A Strange Land** for the small screen.



MY SCI-FI



• Because famous people are fans too •

NOLAN NORTH

THE PROLIFIC GAMING AND ANIMATION VOICE ACTOR DISCUSSES HIS FAVES

Favourite SF/fantasy film

→ *Star Wars* is my first love. I remember seeing it for the first time, and then I remember wanting all the toys. I used to set them up and, for *Empire Strikes Back* – which I think is my favourite – I remember putting up these big white sheets to make it look like Hoth.

Favourite SF/fantasy TV?

→ I am completely in love with *Westworld*. And I read somewhere that they have something like five to seven seasons completely mapped out, so now I'm like, “If this ever gets cancelled, I am going to have to find what they were gonna do.” It's perfect. One of my goals is to get on that show.

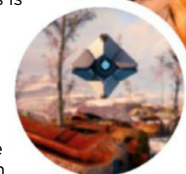
Favourite SF/fantasy books

→ I tend to read more thrillers or non-fiction. Although, when I did the *Arkham* games [in which North voices the Penguin], one of the producers gave me a graphic novel and said, “This is what we're looking to do.” It wasn't really research, I just read a few things, got a sense of the world, that sort of thing.

Favourite SF/fantasy games

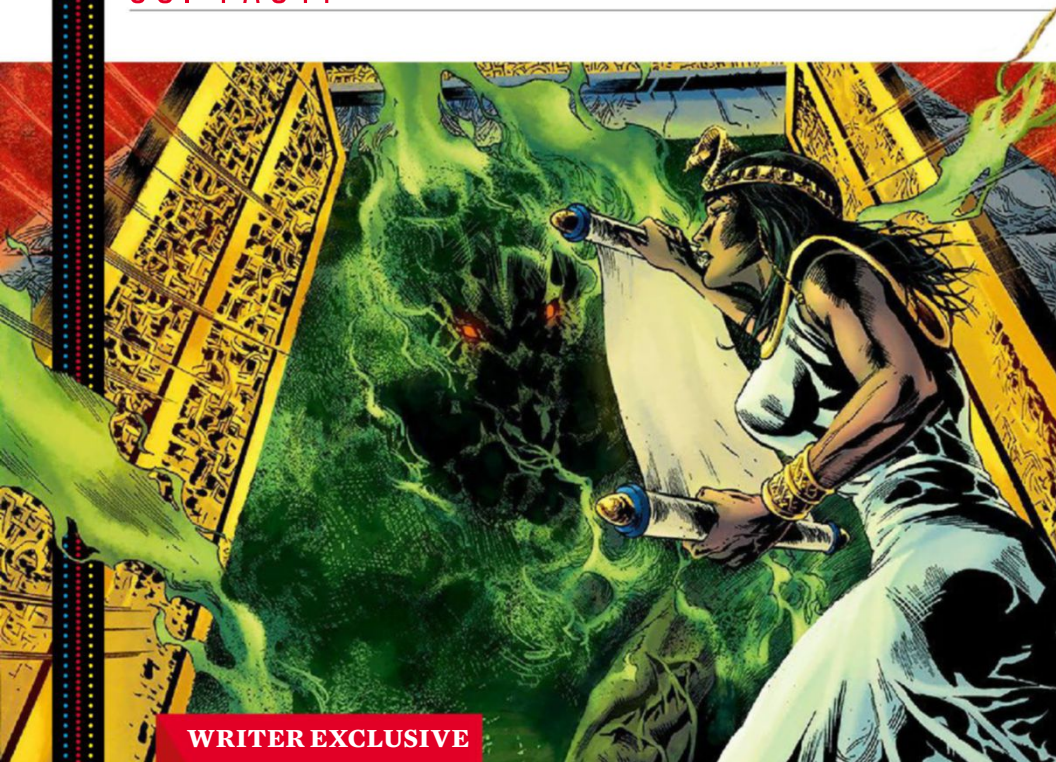
→ I got to voice *Ghost In Destiny* and my son is a massive fan of that game. He'll be playing and I'll just watch that whole world and how it works. We sit there and he'll tell me where he's going and all of a sudden there's my voice saying, “This is the ghost” and I'll be like, “Heehee! That's me!”

Uncharted 4: A Thief's End, where North voices Nathan Drake, is out now on PS4.



© REX (2)

SCI-FACT! The plot of Hammer's first Mummy film in 1959 was based on Universal's *The Mummy's Hand* and *The Mummy's Tomb*.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Big guy in bandages
not on show here.

MUMMY'S THE WORD

Titan launches its new Hammer Comics line with a familiar monster...

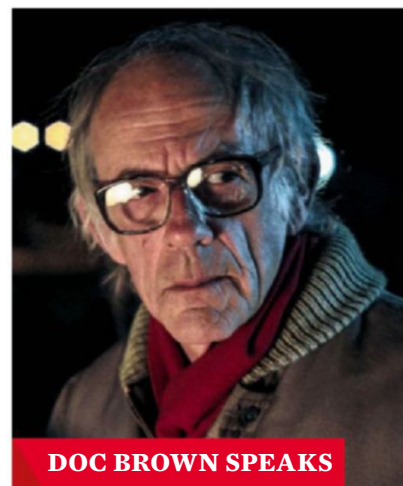
➔ Noting that its "British eccentricity" is what helps Hammer's Mummy movies stand out from the others, Peter Milligan realised that the British film studio's version of the undead, ancient Egyptian monsters would need some updating after he was asked to write a five-issue miniseries for Titan's new line of horror comics.

"It really struck me that the mummies just weren't scary and maybe couldn't be again," Milligan tells Red Alert. "A tall, skinny bloke wrapped in bandages running around just looked comical. And the way the films view Egyptians was negative to say the least. But I still think this subgenre is worthwhile, as it's such fabulously rich territory."

Milligan previously explored the land of the Pharaohs in his 1995 Vertigo miniseries *Egypt*, although he insists that it doesn't have much

in common with *The Mummy: Palimpsest*. "One of the beauties of comics is the opportunity to use and explore your interests," he says, praising the work of artist Ronilson Freire. "His shadowy, creepy art lends a real atmosphere to the story, whether it's in an embalming hall in Ancient Egypt or a stuffy private club in London. And his slightly old-fashioned style is the perfect complement to the horror."

Centring around a woman called Angel, who is trafficked into the UK by a sex gang, the story touches on some very relevant, contemporary concerns. "Angel finds herself in the clutches of a strange group, the Sect of Anubis," reveals Milligan. "I really believe that what follows contains some of the most truly horrific moments in all of the Hammer Mummy history. That's quite a claim, I know, but this is a very different kind of Mummy story." ●



DOC BROWN SPEAKS

SHOCK DOC

Christopher Lloyd swaps flux capacitors for decapitations in bloodthirsty indie...

➔ He took Marty back to the future but screen legend Christopher Lloyd tackles something decidedly darker in *I Am Not A Serial Killer*. "Crowley doesn't really understand himself or where he came from," the actor tells Red Alert about his new role. "He has these urges when death is approaching and I don't get the sense that he questions the morality of that."

It's not long before Lloyd's oldie-with-a-secret locks horns with sadistic teenager neighbour John (Max Records). "John's been diagnosed with tendencies towards becoming a serial killer and he's battling that at the same time that I come up in his life," explains Lloyd. "It's a strange dynamic and an interesting dilemma."

With an IMDb page boasting some 200-odd roles, it's no wonder Lloyd managed to find the humanity in someone as strange as Crowley. "I don't think he's an evil man by nature, it's just the way he exists. He knows there's something not acceptable in what he does but I don't think he feels guilt about it," suggests Lloyd. "It was an interesting character to try to make sense out of."

From Uncle Fester to Judge Doom, it's safe to say Lloyd's played his fair share of oddballs over the years. Luckily for us, there's more to come from this seasoned star. "I love working," he reassures Red Alert. "I have no plans of retiring or anything like that. I just like doing it." ●

I Am Not A Serial Killer is out now.

SCI-FACT! As a journo, Gillen reviewed *Knights Of The Old Republic*, which reignited his love of *Star Wars*.



NEWS WARP HIGH-SPEED FACTS

→ New comic *Star Wars: Darth Maul*, written by Cullen Bunn and drawn by Luke Ross, will kick off in February.

→ DMG Entertainment has bought the film and licensing rights to *The Cosmere*, Brandon Sanderson's series of interconnected fantasy novels.

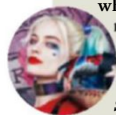
→ Scottish fantasy writer Brian Ruckley is penning *Highlander* prequel comic *There Can Only Be One*, due out in February.

→ Clint Mansell set to provide the score for *Ghost In The Shell*.

→ *Harley Quinn's* spin-off movie will be penned by Christina Hodson, who wrote recent Naomi Watts thriller *Shut In*.

→ Neil Gaiman developing *The Building* – about a skyscraper that moves between alternate realities, including one where Russia dropped the bomb – for Fox.

→ Legendary Pictures, the outfit behind *Interstellar* and *Kong: Skull Island*, nab the rights to *Frank Herbert's Dune*.



AUTHOR EXCLUSIVE

DOCTOR'S ORDERS

A new hope: Kieron Gillen discusses his *Star Wars* comic-book series *Doctor Aphra*

→ **Fans of Marvel's recent comic book run of *Darth Vader*** will agree that one character stood out even more than the heavy-breathing villain himself: the immoral antihero archeologist Doctor Aphra. Firmly established as a fan favourite, Aphra is now being honoured with her own solo series – the first time this has happened for any character originated from the comics.

"The story builds on where we left Aphra at the end of *Darth Vader*," says Kieron Gillen, the writer of both series. "Having escaped the Sith Lord, she's now trying to get back to her life. But this is adventure fiction so 'and then things got much easier for our protagonist' is not the way a story starts."

Of course, making Aphra a lead character means we'll be learning more about her. "I wanted to flesh out the rest of Aphra," Gillen reveals. "In this story, we meet her dad and learn about his obsessive interest in an ancient group of Jedi heretics called the Ordu Aspectu."

All this talk of archeological artefacts and adventure points towards an obvious basis from Lucasfilm's own repertoire. "The core inspiration is an ethically inverted Indiana Jones," Gillen explains. "She's not often a good person. Luckily, she is an entertaining person. Part of the fun of the book is that she bounces around the *Star Wars* universe without really being on anyone's side."

When writing within such a famous arena, it must be tempting to constantly introduce familiar faces from the films? "It's a big universe, and if the same cast just turn up everywhere, it renders it artificial and, even worse, small," Gillen says. "However, I've got one thing I use in the first arc, which I hope will delight and surprise people."

Working with Gillen on the run is artist Kev Walker (*Marvel Zombies*), who has been inspired by the original *Star Wars* artwork since he was a young boy. "He's someone who lives and breathes *Star Wars*," Gillen says. "I talk about references and moods, and know that Kev can synthesise them into something that is simultaneously new and part of the larger fabric."

And what about after Aphra? Could Gillen continue working within the *Star Wars* universe? "Well," he muses, "as the writer of *Phonogram* it can be only time until I pitch a *Behind The Music*-esque story of the Max Rebo Band!" ●

Star Wars: Doctor Aphra #1 is out from Marvel this month.

“DON'T QUOTE ME”

“THERE ARE SEVERAL NEW CHARACTERS WHO ARE GOING TO BE FAN FAVOURITES BECAUSE THEY'RE GREAT, GREAT CHARACTERS.”

Executive producer Shawn Levy can't wait to unveil the new bods in *Stranger Things* season two.



SCI-FACT! *Grimm* star David Giuntoli makes his directing debut with the sixth season episode "Oh Captain, My Captain".

All good things...

TV EXCLUSIVE

TALE END

The creators of dark fantasy procedural *Grimm* prepare us for its final season

➔ Like even the darkest fairytale, *Grimm* is coming to an end. After six years of myth and folklore-fuelled urban fantasy, its final season will bow out with a 13-episode bang. And according to executive producers Jim Kouf and David Greenwalt it's going to be as big a bang as possible. "We're doing 13 episodes," says Greenwalt of the shorter-than-usual season, "because they're so big, they're so bold – and a little hairy – that that's all we could possibly do right now."

"We're picking up exactly where we left off," says Kouf of the season six premiere. "We have to deal with the hole we dug for ourselves."

“We have to deal with the hole we dug for ourselves”

The Captain's got a big issue coming up. So does Juliette – Eve, who is she? What is she dealing with? We have the stick to deal with, the power of that. The ring is another thing. All this stuff." Adds Greenwalt: "We got to take on history, royalty. Now we're gonna tackle some even bigger stuff."

Regarding the life-saving powers of "the stick" (aka the Treasure of the Knights Templar) and Adalind's cursed wedding ring, Kouf reveals: "There's some other emotional issues going on besides the ring, but she's still got the ring and she's afraid to take it off. And the power of the stick – where does it come from?"

"How does it affect people who either use it or have it used on them?" teases Greenwalt. "Nothing's free in life. You gotta pay a price." To complicate matters for its heroes, *Grimm* has more

new Wesen waiting in the wings, including a monster pulled from Spanish folklore. "I think we're up to 89, 90 of them," laughs Greenwalt of the show's current Wesen count. "El Cuelebre is coming. It's a real myth, like Chupacabra. It's physically different to anything we've ever done before, and also psychically different. It's a really interesting story that involves innocent little babies..."

While Kouf admits that *Grimm*'s protagonists will endure "a lot of suffering" in their final season, Greenwalt tells us to expect at least some moments of joy. "It's a joyous show, but life is not easy for any of these people in a world where there are Wesen and Grimms," he says. "There's lots to work out this year. All of these things have now come to a head between everybody." ●

Grimm season six will air on W in early 2017.

SCI-FACT! The show's exec producer Barry Sonnenfeld also brought us the *Men In Black* trilogy and the *Addams Family* films.



FIVE MINUTES WITH... **NEIL PATRICK HARRIS**

The star schemes as Count Olaf in
TV's *A Series Of Unfortunate Events*

ONCE UPON A TIME

“Barry Sonnenfeld came to my house in New York to explain his vision of the series before I signed up for it. And it was so dark and fully-realised and almost Cirque du Soleil. He had such a vision and one of his visions was darkness, and it had to stem from Olaf.”

SPEED READING

“I didn't know the books by Daniel Handler. I knew that they existed. I liked the titles. But by the time I was interested in reading them, there had been seven or eight of them. Like *Breaking Bad*... I love *Breaking Bad* but I'm still on season one, episode four! But I read the first book as I was reading the script. I loved it.”

SNAPPING UP SNAPE

“I was trying to channel Alan Rickman a lot. Legitimately. He had great elocution and love for the language and the way the mouth creates words... I think that's much more terrifying than growling, screaming and spitting.”

OLD HAM

“Olaf is random and rare – he's a legitimately bad actor and thinks he's really talented. That allowed me the freedom to be really bad... I wasn't playing Mark Rylance as a Shakespeare actor where I had to be really good. I could do ridiculous, awful acting, and it made even more sense.”

METHOD MAN

“I spent three hours every day transforming into Olaf. I've heard people watch movies as they get that much make-up put on. What I did was put a bunch of pictures of the children, the actors, and cut them out and put 'x's over their eyes and ripped them up, so I could stare at them with disdain!”

A Series Of Unfortunate Events premieres on Netflix on 13 January.

SCI-FACT! Bardugo says: "I suspect that I'll write again in another corner of the Grisha world." We can't wait.

Leigh Bardugo enjoyed writing about "a kind hero".

AUTHOR EXCLUSIVE

AMAZON PRIMED

Fantasy author Leigh Bardugo talks *Crooked Kingdom* and writing *Wonder Woman*...

➔ "Kaz is a lot smarter than I am," laughs author Leigh Bardugo of the super-intelligent lead character in her new novel *Crooked Kingdom*. "It took a lot of work!" No kidding. Introduced in *Six Of Crows* – which is set in a different corner of the world Bardugo introduced in her Grisha Trilogy – Kaz is a wily opportunist who masterminds a deadly heist. Set during the job's wake, sequel *Crooked Kingdom* sees Kaz and his comrades double-crossed and fighting to survive in a world where allies are hard to find.

"It feels really good!" Bardugo says of finishing the duology, which acts as a companion piece to the Grisha books. "I think they're better than the Grisha Trilogy. These books were incredibly challenging to write; I was really pushing myself."

Having established herself as a *New York Times* bestselling author, Bardugo is going from

strength to strength. A clear sign of that is the fact that DC hired her to write their new *Wonder Woman* novel – and according to Bardugo, the superhero was a soothing tonic after the darkness of her *Six Of Crows* series. "I would finish writing a draft and have really positive feelings about humanity," she laughs.

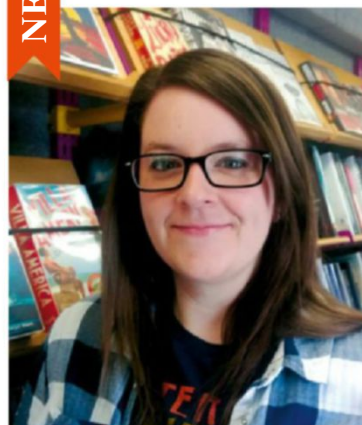
Her novel *Wonder Woman: Warbringer* follows Diana as a 17-year-old and will be published in August 2017. Describing the book as a standalone that has nothing to do with the cinematic DC universe, Bardugo reveals: "It really was thrilling to get to put my own stamp on Amazon mythology. Also, one of the fundamental parts of *Wonder Woman* is she's deeply kind. It was a pleasure to write about somebody who's trying so very hard to do the right thing even if she occasionally stumbles." ●

Crooked Kingdom is out now from Indigo.

NEW AUTHOR

GX TODD

MEET THE THRILLER WRITER WHO ALSO DRIVES A 35-FOOT MOBILE LIBRARY!



Describe the world of *Defender*...

➔ It's set seven years after the sudden appearance of internal voices convinced a large percentage of the population to kill themselves or each other. The world's been left torn, its survivors scared and hostile towards anyone who still hears a voice.

Who are your protagonists?

➔ Lacey is your typical 16-year-old: naive, cocky, idealistic. Pilgrim is taciturn and jaded, and hears a voice of his own. It talks him into helping Lacey cross the 600 dangerous miles to her sister's home. Their relationship is a grudging one at first; Pilgrim is hard to win over.

What was your initial inspiration?

➔ Basically, I wanted to investigate the psychological effect of loneliness. So I emptied the world, stuck my characters in it, and added the extra facet of inner voices to increase the paranoia and fear. Then I let it all run free.

Are you a fan of post-apocalyptic books?

➔ A big fan! Reading Wyndham's *The Chrysalids* aged 15 cemented the love; then I discovered *I Am Legend*, which blew me away. Then there's *The Stand*, of course.

How long did *Defender* take to write?

➔ The first draft, five months. A further 40,000 words were added because it became obvious there was a *much* bigger story to tell. Characters and overarching storylines had to evolve to fit in with the epic Good vs Evil battle forming in my head!

Defender is published by Headline on 12 January.





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Red Alert Feb 2017

Freeze Frame

Top trailers dissected

SCI-FACT! Not seen in the trailer: Richard E Grant as Zander Rice, head of Transigen.

LOGAN

OUT
3 MARCH
2017

The end of days have arrived in Wolverine's third solo cinema outing



⬆ A close-up of a shaky hand. Johnny Cash's mournful "Hurt" playing. It's fair to say this isn't going to be the Wolverine you remember.



⬆ An older-looking (and battle-scarred) Logan (Hugh Jackman), drowns his sorrows at a funeral (but whose?). "Mutants... they're gone now."



⬆ Wolvie's not the only one looking older (his third film's set in 2024). Here's Professor X (Patrick Stewart), laid up in a hospital bed.



⬆ But who's this young whippersnapper? "She's like you," Prof X says of Laura (Sienna Novikov), aka X-23. "Very much like you."



⬆ She's also, it seems, being hunted by an elite organisation. The name "Transigen" doesn't feature in the trailer, but that's who this lot are.



⬆ Prof X is out of bed! And (in a nod to comic *Old Man Logan*) he's trying to convince a very not-interested Logan to help Laura out.



⬆ Clearly he changes his mind - no doubt when he encounters Donald Pierce (Boyd Holbrook), the cyborg leader of mutant-hunting Reavers.



⬆ He may be getting a bit old, but Wolvie's still got it, cracking out his signature "leap yelling through the air with claws extended" move.



⬆ In the comics, Laura's a Wolvie clone made from a damaged copy of his genome. That's why she's able to floor a police squad with ease.



⬆ Does she have claws, too? This shot of needle-like sharp things clashing with Wolvie's bone-claws certainly suggests as much.



⬆ Logan's angry and miserable, but it seems he's still a big softie at heart, taking Laura under his wing. Bless.



⬆ "Logan, you still have time," says Prof X. For redemption? To turn his life around? To finally shave off his mutton chops? We'll find out.

The Buzz



JAYNE It's great to see the X-Men franchise turning in a grittier direction. But do Johnny Cash's legendary vocals give this trailer an edge the film won't actually have?



RICH Unlike any other superhero trailer I've ever seen. And if the whole film can sustain this thoughtful, melancholy tone without succumbing to the usual last act nonsense, I'm very excited.



NICK From the hint of original, day-after-tomorrow *Mad Max* in the visuals to the desert-weathered fatalism of Johnny Cash's vocals, this looks a genuinely intriguing finale.



RHIAN Wow this looks good! Totally different in style and tone - and rating - from the rest of the X films but hopefully a great way for Hugh Jackman to finally sheathe his claws.

SCI-FACT! KB Wagers cites Kameron Hurley's *Bel Dame Apocrypha* novels as her favourites.



AFTERLIFE CELEBRATING ICONIC SCI-FI STARS

123

STEPHEN HUNTER

Bombur in The Hobbit trilogy



Bifur, Bofur and Bombur are in a tightknit class all of their own in the *Hobbit* trilogy. Of this bumbling bunch of Dwarves, Bombur is distinctive for his quick-thinking intellect, portly size, non-verbal grunts and surprising-for-his-size fighting prowess – and so left an undeniably big impression on audiences. We caught up with Stephen Hunter, the New Zealand comedian who embodied him...

Would you like to play the role again?

→ Oh, absolutely. I'd be back there in a heartbeat. It was an awesome challenge to get the essence of him across without any words.

What's the strangest request you've had from a fan?

→ The weirdest one happened at a convention but not to me, to Graham McTavish (Dwalin). He signed this girl's arm and the next day she came back and it was tattooed into her arm!

Would any of Bombur's skills or attributes have been useful in real life?

→ It's actually quite scary when you look at the cast of Dwarfs and realise how similar they are to the characters they play. I love cooking and eating and my character was a big cook so while not skills these are big similarities.

Did you get any souvenirs from the set?

→ I may have a few coins of Smaug's mounted but don't tell anyone [laughs]!

Is there anything you think was unfinished about Bombur's story?

→ I always thought if Bombur, Nori and Bofur maybe started a casino at the Lonely Mountain you could go there!

What'd it say on Bombur's gravestone?

→ Ate. Thought. Slept.



DONALD BRANUM

AUTHOR EXCLUSIVE

FORECAST: HAIL

Catching up with the kick-ass heroine in KB Wagers' space opera *After The Crown*...



Ellen Ripley. General Leia Organa.

Rey. These are just a few of the iron-willed genre heroines author KB Wagers name-checks as her favourites. It's no surprise, then, that the heroine in her *Indranan War* book series is as tough-talking and fearless as any of them. "I love her smart mouth and how she uses it very deliberately," Wagers tells *Red Alert* of Hail, the sarcastic gunrunner we met in her debut novel *Behind The Throne*. "She also has a natural ability to lead people, which is a skill I've always admired."

Where *Throne* introduced us to Hail as she was forced to confront her destiny as empress of the Indranan Empire, follow-up *After The Crown* finds her struggling to deal with her new powers. "We feel a little of the suffocation that Hail suffers through in the beginning of the book," Wagers reveals. "And when everything goes sideways we get to see her using her gunrunning skills as the empress,

which provides an entirely new challenge."

Infused with Wagers' love for space opera, *After The Crown* is darker than *Throne* as Hail attempts to prevent intergalactic war despite betrayal and failed peace talks at every turn. *Crown* also introduces new characters destined to be fan favourites. "People are going to love Hao, who was Hail's mentor from her gunrunning days," Wagers says. "He's fun, not quite trustworthy, but so very handy to have in a fight."

Meanwhile, Wagers is already finishing up a draft of the as-yet-untitled trilogy-closer. "Readers will get the shocking reveal of the bad guy behind Indrana's troubles," she teases. "Plus watch Hail's bodyguards try to keep their empress alive against all odds – and witness the conclusion to Hail's journey!" ●

After The Crown is published by Orbit on Tuesday 13 December.

Red Alert Image Bank

Feb 2017

Where pictures are greater than words

SCI-FACT! Margot Robbie was in line to play the Major in *Ghost In The Shell* before Scarlett Johansson signed up.

ART ATTACK

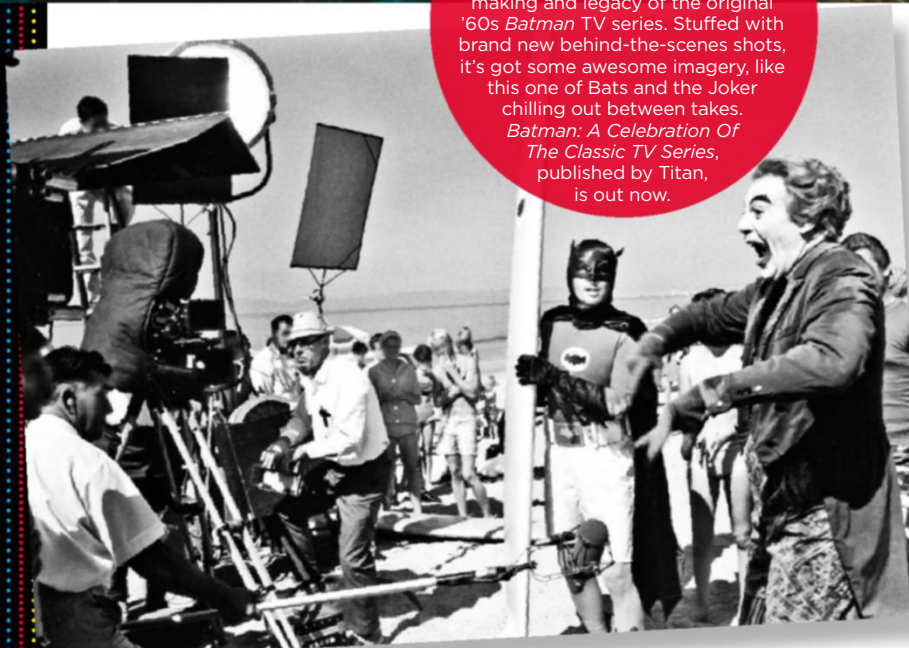
🔗 In a special one-off event last month, HBO unveiled the *Game Of Thrones* Gallery in London for one week only to celebrate the launch of the show's sixth season on DVD and Blu-ray. Showcasing stunning fan art, actual episode storyboards and a giant eff-off White Walker made out of fabric, it was a fitting tribute to George RR Martin's creation.

SHELL-SHOCKED

🔗 As the *Ghost In The Shell* remake inches ever closer, Scarlett Johansson and director Rupert Sanders hosted the film's global launch party in Tokyo last month. They exhibited a load of the film's costumes and props - including this geisha android mask. With its hideous/beautiful detailing, it looks like something Guillermo del Toro has nightmares about...

BAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

🔗 Holy chuckles, Batman! Titan has released a brand-new, glossy tome that looks back through the making and legacy of the original '60s *Batman* TV series. Stuffed with brand new behind-the-scenes shots, it's got some awesome imagery, like this one of Bats and the Joker chilling out between takes. *Batman: A Celebration Of The Classic TV Series*, published by Titan, is out now.



SCI-FACT! Eddie Redmayne auditioned for the role of Kylo Ren in *The Force Awakens*.

STAR WATCH

A NEWS HOPE

"How long are you going to let me stand here with this?"



➔ **With the first standalone *Star Wars* movie finally landing in cinemas this month, Star Watch has decided it's time to point our electrobinoculars much further into the future.**

While we sit here craving the adventure and excitement of an *Episode VIII* trailer to tie in with *Rogue One*'s release, there are a few (albeit tenuous) rumours floating around the next instalment of the Skywalker family saga. Much of the internet is interpreting comments Daisy Ridley made to *Vulture* as confirmation that the identity of Rey's parents will be revealed when the story resumes next December. "We will see in a year," she said when asked if Jakku's most famous resident is actually Obi-Wan Kenobi's sprog. "Just sit tight on that question." Hardly conclusive... In fact, so impressive is Lucasfilm's lockdown that the next juiciest gossip to escape this month involves *Making Star Wars*. *net*'s unconfirmed rumours that Luke Skywalker's costume might be darker than in *The Force Awakens*, and that Rey will at some point become frustrated with his teachings. Not exactly a spoiler even if true...

In the world of scoundrels and scruffy-looking nerfherders, however, information seems a little more free-flowing. The star of 2018's Han Solo prequel, Alden Ehrenreich, told *Variety*, "I can say that Chewbacca's in the film," while *The Hollywood Reporter*'s Borys Kit tweeted that "a couple of sources tell me the #HanSolo spin-off will tell how Lando Calrissien [sic] lost the Millennium Falcon to Han". Seems fairly plausible to us - all we know in the rebooted canon is that he lost it "fair and square". We've also learned that Han will run into someone played by *Game Of Thrones*' Emilia Clarke, who's just joined the cast. And finally, having been confirmed to play Lando in the movie, *Community*'s Donald Glover has been given a "Don't mess this up!" instruction by his mum. No pressure there, then... ●

Back to Earth with a bump.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

COSMIC HOMECOMING

***Star-Lord* falls to Earth for solo comic run...**



➔ **After focusing on another "outcast on Earth" in his recent *Howard The Duck* run, Chip Zdarsky is taking on a less feathery outer space exile in *Star-Lord*. Illustrated by Kris Anka, Peter Quill's latest solo series will see the irascible Guardian of the Galaxy marooned on his home planet following the devastating events of *Civil War II*.**

"It's a chance for me to work within continuity as the *Howard* book kind of skirted around the periphery of what was actually happening in the Marvel universe," Zdarsky tells Red Alert. "But *Star-Lord* as a character is much more integral, as he appears in all the big crossovers and the main *Guardians* book, so I kind of liked the idea of the challenge."

With Peter consigned to New York City, his usual partners in intergalactic crime will be conspicuous by their absence. However, there will be plenty of opportunities for him to lock horns with the likes of Daredevil, Wolverine and Agent Brand, as Peter quickly falls foul of

the law. "I'm trying to keep the other Guardians out of the book for now so that I can concentrate on Peter's solo adventuring," reasons Zdarsky. "But for sure he'll cross paths with other Marvel characters. I'd be a fool not to take advantage of him being on Earth and not have him mingle with Earth characters."

The son of alien overlord Jason of Spartax, who met his mother Meredith Quill after crash-landing on Earth, Peter reconnects with his roots after being stranded. "Despite his alien heritage, Peter is essentially human," explains Zdarsky. "So with the Guardians, he's the anomaly, but here he's the norm. It's fun to explore how that affects his psyche, going back to that after years of getting embroiled in big cosmic adventures. That being said, we can only explore that for so long before we're back in space, after all the book isn't called *Earth-Lord*!" ●

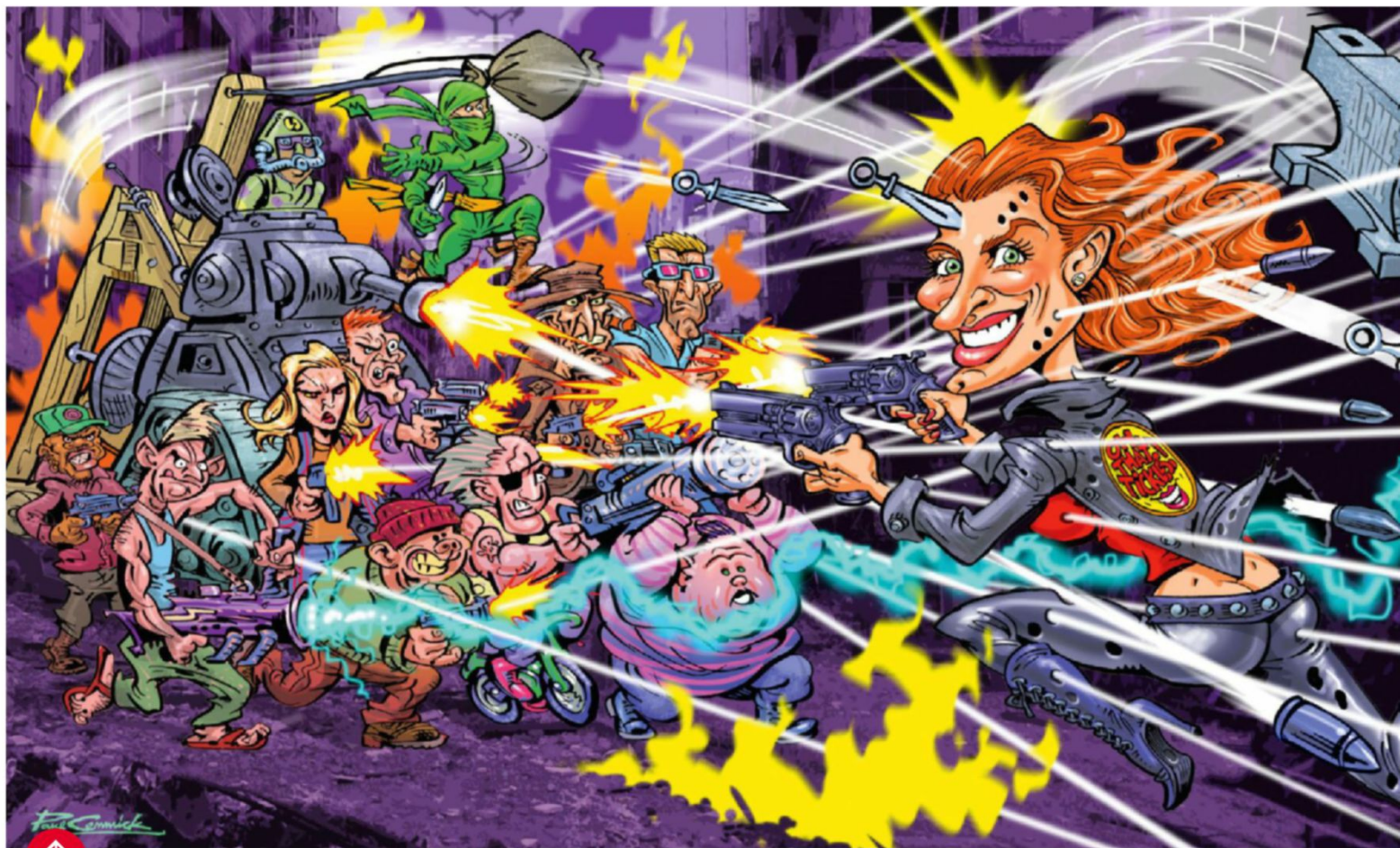
Star-Lord #1 is published by Marvel Comics on 21 December.



Nick Setchfield's

DEVELOPMENT HELL

Your monthly glimpse into Hollywood's hoped-for future



PASS THE PANADOL!

PAINKILLER JANE

❖ *Interstellar*'s **Jessica Chastain** is the new, shotgun-proof face of Painkiller Jane, the indestructible comic book heroine. Originally created by **Jimmy Palmiotti** and **Joe Quesada** for Event Comics in 1995, Jane Vasko's a tough-ass undercover cop who develops superhuman regenerative abilities after nearly dying in an explosion

while infiltrating the Mob. Now she's miraculously able to recover from gunshot wounds, axe assaults, chemical weapon attacks and other things we don't want you trying at home, kids. Jacking in the day job, she sets out in pursuit of personal vengeance. Imagine a vigilante Wile E. Coyote and you're there. Jane's been brought to the screen before – Emmanuelle Vaugier played her in a 2005 Sci-Fi

Channel TV movie, Kristanna Loken in a one-shot series in 2007. There's no writer or director attached but Chastain will produce alongside **Lenny Beckerman** and **Stephen L'Heureux**.

MUTANT CRISIS!

DEADPOOL 2

❖ Hold the chimichangas. The Merc with a Mouth is in urgent

need of a new helmer. Yes, **Tim Miller** – director of this year's fourth wall-busting *Deadpool* – is no longer attached to the sequel. It's apparently an amicable split though one triggered by creative clashes with star **Ryan Reynolds**. Word is the flashpoint was the proposed casting of fan-fave mutant co-star Cable – Miller wanted *Bloodline*'s **Kyle Chandler** for the role, Reynolds didn't, and

the studio backed the star. "I'm sad to see him off the film," states Reynolds. "Tim's brilliant and nobody worked harder on *Deadpool* than he did." Now *John Wick* co-director **David Leitch** is said to be the frontrunner to direct. And they'll need a new composer, too – **Junkie XL** has quit in solidarity with Miller. Why they couldn't just settle their differences with a spot of bloody, quip-filled ultra-violence is beyond us, but there you go...

HERE IS THE NEWS!

FANTASTIC BEASTS 2

🔥 Newt Scamander is spawning. **JK Rowling's** magizoologist is set to hunt *Fantastic Beasts* in no less than four more movies. "It's ambitious to tell it in five because we're spanning 19 years," Rowling tells *Variety*. "But I can see an arc." Targeting a 16 November 2018 release, the second film in the newborn franchise will relocate the action to Britain and Paris – while finding room for a Chinese beast. Producer **David Heyman** aims to deliver a Newt Scamander adventure every two years, building towards a final movie that takes place in 1945 – and, as students of Potter-lore know, that's the year of Dumbledore's climactic duel with dark wizard Gellert Grindelwald, a character we've already glimpsed in the form of **Johnny Depp**. Also set for more screentime is **Ezra Miller** as Credence: "We follow Credence further," director **David Yates** reveals. "He becomes quite pivotal, actually. Credence is quite crucial."

THAT STING YOU DO!

GREEN HORNET

🔥 When last we saw trilby-topped crime-smasher the Green Hornet he bore a remarkable if unlikely resemblance to Seth Rogen. It's an image that Paramount Pictures hopes to purge from your brain. The studio bagged the rights to the hero after they lapsed at Sony Pictures and now plans a hard-edged, smirk-free reboot. "My intention is to bring a gravitas to *The Green Hornet* that wipes away the camp and kitsch of the previous iteration," says director/



→ **Samuel L. Jackson** orbiting disaster tale *Inversion*...
Max Landis writing and directing a remake of father John's *An American Werewolf In London*... **Dean Devlin** directing *Countdown*... **Steve Carell** joining *Minecraft* movie...
Relativity prepping an *Immortals* sequel...
Amblin adapting graphic novel *Dan And Sam*...
Spartacus's **Nick Tarabay** joining *Pacific Rim: Maelstrom*...
Fox Animation adapting *Margaret Dilloway*'s *Momotaro: Xander And The Island Of Lost Monsters*...
Cedric Nicolas-Troyan directing adap of French graphic novel *Naja*...
Mark Osborne writing and directing Warner Bros's take on **Jeff Smith's** Eisner-winning *Bone*...
Disney's remake of *The Black Hole* stalling...
Universal developing live action version of *Voltron*, scripted by **David Hayter**...
Akiva Goldsman producing and potentially directing an adaptation of **Rob Liefeld's** comic *Avenge*...
For *Paramount*... **Mark Swift** and **Damian Shannon** writing the *Starship Troopers* reboot...
Edge Of Tomorrow 2 both a sequel and a prequel says director **Doug Liman**...



“We’ve chosen to make it not just that group of buff, tough guys”

producer **Gavin O'Connor** (it helps if you imagine him vowing this while gazing over a moonlit, smoke-wreathed cityscape). "I want to re-mythologise the Green Hornet in a contemporary context, with an emphasis on story and character... We will put a vigilante engine under the hood of his character." The surprisingly straight-faced '60s TV show made a star of Bruce Lee as Kato, the Hornet's martial artist sidekick. Stand by your nunchucks, Donnie Yen...

FRESH MEAT!

JURASSIC WORLD 2

🔥 The beasts of *Jurassic World* are already smacking their prehistoric chops at the prospect of their next crunchy, bite-sized treats: **Toby Jones** and **Rafe Spall** are the latest names to be dangled over the raptor pen, joining established stars **Chris Pratt** and **Bryce Dallas Howard** in *JA Bayona's* sequelsaurus. Filming is set to kick off in March and the director is keen to forge a link to Steven Spielberg's 1993 original. "What we're doing is a sequel to *Jurassic World*," Bayona tells *Cinema Blend*, "but it's definitely the fifth chapter of a longer saga... I think the story is looking for a connection between *Jurassic World* and *Jurassic Park* – more than what *Jurassic World* did." The movie is chasing a 22 June 2018 release. "We're leading the story to a place that the audience is not expecting," says Bayona, "and that's always exciting when you do a sequel."

DREADLOCK HORRORDAY!

THE PREDATOR

🔥 *X-Men: Apocalypse's* **Olivia**

Munn is the latest name to be linked to *Shane Black's* retooling of the *Predator* franchise. Filming begins in the dependably moist environs of Vancouver mid-February and Black promises to remain faithful to the franchise's core principles. "I think the *Predator* movies have slightly veered from typical sci-fi in that there is a sort of thriller aspect to them," he tells *Collider*. "I think it should be scary, I think it should be funny and I think ultimately it should be wondrous and about perceiving things that human beings very seldom get a chance to see." The helmer says the film's ensemble of beast-bait will echo the characters we saw in the 1987 original, but with a twist: "We've deliberately chosen to make it not just that group of buff, tough guys." Oh, and forget recent rumblings that the movie will unleash its dreadlocked antagonists upon everyday suburbia – Black says they definitely won't be "lurking in rich, fancy swimming pools".

DRAKE'S PROGRESS!

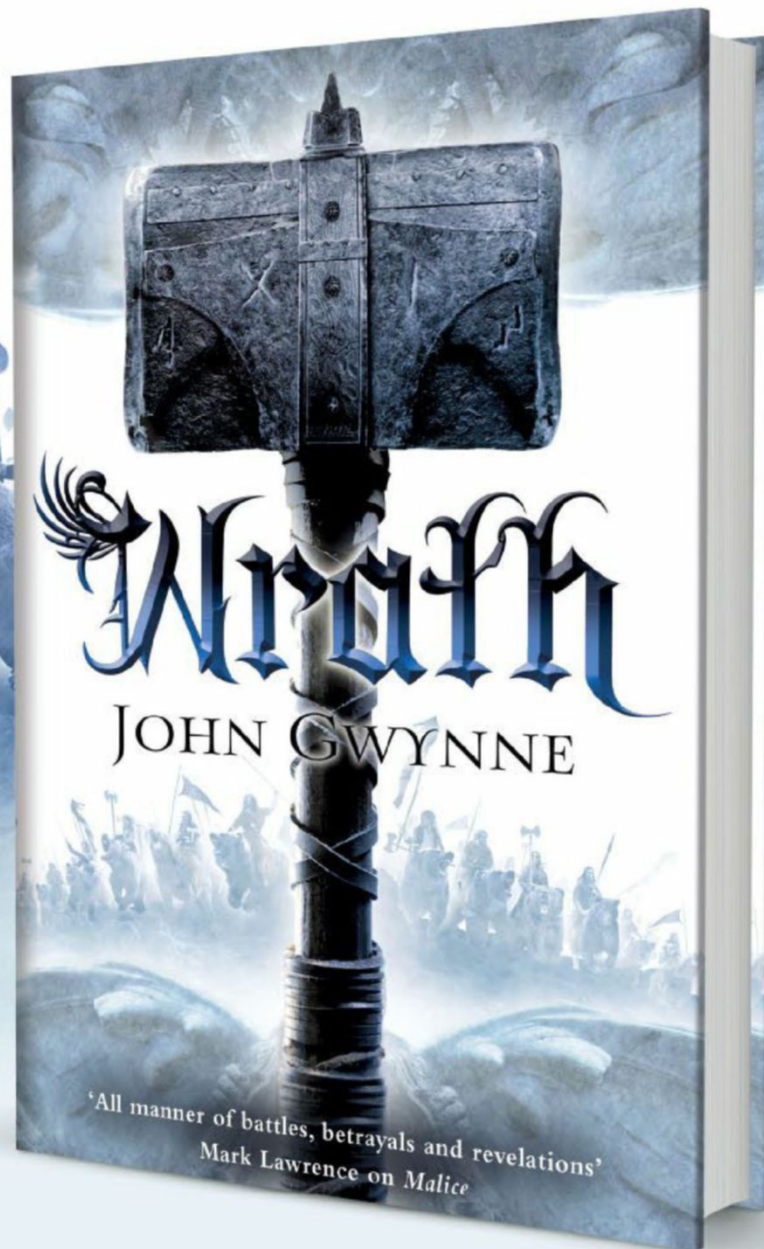
UNCHARTED

🔥 *Night At The Museum's* **Shawn Levy** is the director who will finally bring treasure-seeking rogue Nathan "Nate" Drake to the screen. A movie adaptation of the popular PlayStation franchise has been smouldering in Development Hell since 2008 – everyone from Mark Wahlberg to Chris Pratt has been linked to the roguish, globe-hopping lead – but now it has a screenplay by *The Grey's* **Joe Carnahan**, who originally hoped to direct too. You might imagine Drake's in a race to the multiplex with the soon-to-be-resurrected Indiana Jones but Levy is keen to play down comparisons with the whip-wielding archaeologist. "People compare *Uncharted* to [*Indiana Jones*] because both are treasure-hunting movies," he tells *Collider*. "Maybe from a million miles away it'll have those *Indy* elements, but [this is] much grittier, more naturalistic, real-world, contemporary." Expect a mid-2018 release – a whole year ahead of *Indiana Jones 5*... 🍌



Illustration by Paul Cemmick

THE EPIC CONCLUSION TO THE
FAITHFUL AND THE FALLEN QUARTET



OUT NOW

BRAVE THE BATTLE

Praise for The Faithful and the Fallen series . . .

'Gwynne hits all the right spots . . . definitely one to watch'

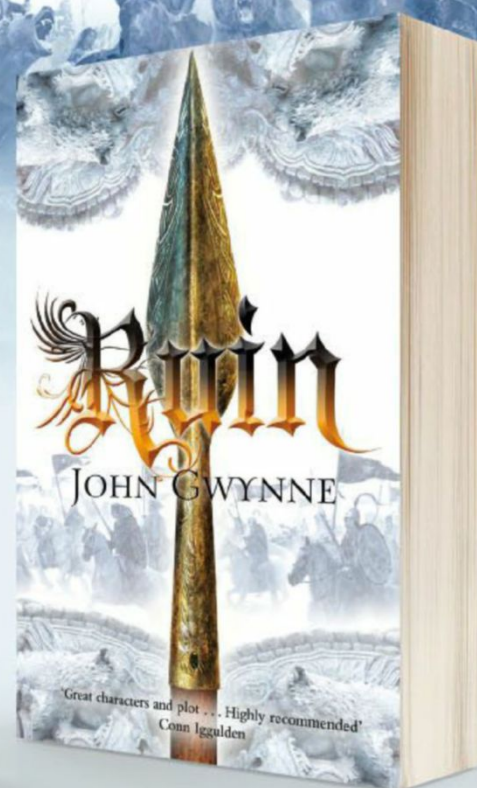
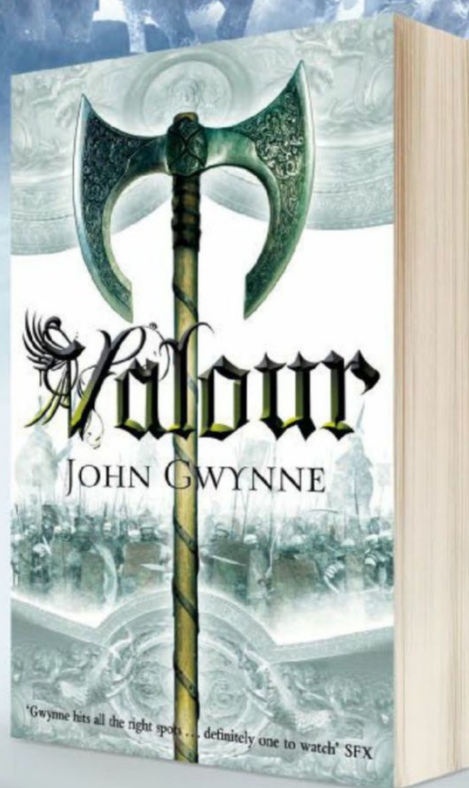
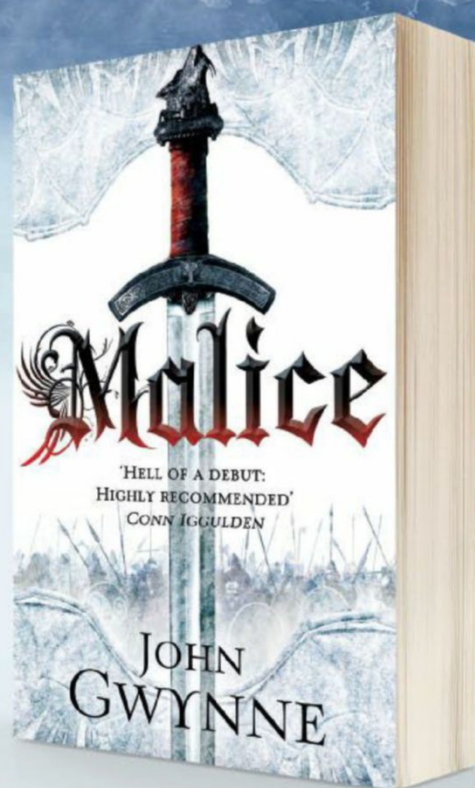
SFX

'Hell of a debut: highly recommended'

Conn Iggulden

'A strong contender for the if you like
Game of Thrones, why not try this? award'

Independent



//// SFX HAILING FREQUENCIES OPEN! ////

First Contact



THIS MONTH'S COMMUNICATIONS MONITOR

NICK SETCHFIELD,
FEATURES EDITOR



Let's give the All-Seeing Eye of Agamotto a quick polish, shall we?

Look, the mystical peeper is opening... the vapours of Valtorr are clearing... cough... behold, swirling out of the infinite, the *SFX* readership's thoughts on *Doctor Strange*! Yes, we wanted your opinions on Marvel's sorcerous blockbuster and you delivered, along with takes on everything from *Class* to *Westworld* to the divisive new season of *The Walking Dead*. Get in touch using the contacts opposite. If you want to show off, we take astral projection and thought-forms too...

SFX Hot Topic Your views on the month's big issue

#DOCTOR STRANGE

🔗 **Stephen McAfee, online** Probably the best Marvel movie since *Guardians Of The Galaxy*.

🔗 **Tomas Becks, Facebook** The effects are amazing, Cumberbatch, Ejiofor, Swinton and McAdams knock it out of the park, Mikkelsen is a scary villain and it's got a lot of – often subtle – humour. It's a film that opens up so many possibilities for the MCU and it makes me really excited to see Strange interact with the other Avengers.

SFX Forget Civil War and Infinity War. If Cumberbatch shares the screen with RDJ we're looking at all-out Goatee War.

🔗 **Mark Howe, Facebook** Much funnier than I expected. A great intro to the character and Benedict Cumberbatch was perfect. The only real negative was that the villain wasn't particularly developed, but that's forgivable given there's only so much you can squeeze into two hours.

🔗 **Hywel David Evans, Facebook** Poor. No depth,

emotion or drama. The less said about Dormammu or the Beyoncé jokes the better.

🔗 **Mark Waters, Facebook** Marvel have done so much to redefine the superhero genre, playing with audience expectations and prioritising character over spectacle. *Doctor Strange* is great fun but it is actually a step backwards from all of this. It's their weakest film since *Iron Man 2*.

🔗 **Iain Aitken, Facebook** Some of the effects scenes are like MC Escher took serious acid.

🔗 **Richard Smith, Facebook** The cloak was the star!

🔗 **Tom Gray, Twitter** The big unmarked time jumps made it impossible to tell the internal timeline. Did it cover years or months? Or even days?

🔗 **Alice B, email** Having used most of their best superheroes already, Marvel are now showcasing their lesser ones, and the resulting film is pretty much as you'd expect.

🔗 **William Simpson, Twitter** I want an Eye of Agamotto!

SFX I want to live in the Sanctum – if I could find a lower demonic being to do the dusting..

🔗 **Jonathan Barclay, online** I absolutely loved it. Saw it in Imax 3D, which helped. Not sure how it will come across in 2D, on a standard screen



Cumberbatch goes on a trip – drug-free!



Get in touch!

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“The only real negative was that the villain wasn’t developed”

on TV, but the Imax experience was very immersive and really helped with the 3D. Aside from that I found it added a much-needed new dimension to the Marvel universe, which is becoming a bit tired.

• **Keith Tudor, online** *Doctor Strange* was one of those movies where the 3D worked really well. The CGI villain at the end looked a little too cartoonish, though. The big finale largely happening in reverse, and the time loop trap, felt very fresh. I enjoyed the humour in the film too. I was hoping for more of a mention of other Marvel supernatural characters when the reveal that the supernatural exists occurred, such as Blade or Ghost Rider (to tie in with the current *Agents Of SHIELD* season) but nevertheless the film was great fun and a real spectacle in the cinema.

• **Stephen Coombs, online** The film is a blast, though I could have done with rather more Kaecilius action. I also hoped he'd have a scene in a garden or among greenery to get in the phrase “Kaecilius est in horto” (flashback to the Cambridge Latin course at school...).

SFX *We're not playing to the cheap seats here, are we, Stephen?*



The walking man about to make somebody dead.

#YOU'RE DEAD TO ME

• **Chris Wilkes, email** That's it. I'm done with *The Walking Dead*. I've stuck with that show for six years. I've put up with the times when nothing much happens, following characters I often don't much like, because it was almost worth it in those amazing episodes when it all comes together and it's the most gripping, exciting, tense show on TV. But the season seven premiere broke me.

It was bad enough leaving us with that frustrating “Negan's bashed a mystery character's head in” cliffhanger. And then, after over half a year of waiting for some resolution, the result was one of the nastiest, most harrowing bits of television (or indeed movies) I've ever sat through. It's like it was getting off on the brutality, revelling in how unpleasant one man can be to people he's never met – seeing one of the show's few genuinely likeable characters struggling for words, his eye popping out of his skull as he awaits the killer blow from a baseball bat, is not entertainment, it's exploitation.

So goodbye Rick, Maggie, Daryl and the rest. I'd like to say it's been fun, but mostly it's often been a harrowing experience. Give me a

call when the survivors rediscover that town called hope.

SFX *If you've been affected by events in this season of Walking Dead we have a dedicated hotline available. Just call 0-555-555-PUT-THE-BAT-DOWN-YOU-MANIAC. Our trained counsellors are standing by.*

#BAD TIMING

• **Tonia Small, email** I was really looking forward to the second series of *Humans* on Channel 4, because I absolutely loved the first one. But then I made the mistake of watching the first two episodes of *Westworld*, and then I watched *Humans*. Now all I can think is how cheap and small *Humans* looks in comparison. And I kind of hate myself because obviously C4 don't have the same budget as HBO, and they also did a show about synthetic humans first (excusing *BSG*, of course). So why do I prefer *Westworld*? I feel very guilty. I can't be the only one...?

SFX *Bloomin' Westworld! Spoiling it for everyone with their lavish budget, stunning locations and A-list talent! Take all that away and what do you have? Okay, you have an absolutely killer concept and a nerve-shredding narrative, but aside from that... →*



A better cape than that Superman's!

Does *Class* deserve detention or gold stars?



“The plots are so routine they could be by a computer”

called *Celia* (although it was also released in some countries under the livelier title *Celia – Child Of Terror*). It was released on DVD by Second Run in 2009 featuring an interview with the director Ann Turner. And it is really quite good. **SFX** Always knew we could rely on the readers of **SFX**. We may be living in a counter-factual, post-expert world, but hey, when the chips are down and you need to know the truth about myxomatosis-themed rabbit cinema, who else are you going to turn to?

#LACK OF CLASS?

Chris Nelson, email *Class* is a disappointment. And it hasn't exactly set the world buzzing, has it? While I partly blame that on the fact that it's on the near-invisible BBC Three online, it's also because it just isn't great. It's a bit like a British *Buffy*, but not as dynamic. The plots are so routine they could have been knocked out by a computer, and the characters don't do much for me either. Okay, I'm older than the target audience (mid thirties), but I am a *Doctor Who* fan so expected a bit more. **SFX** On the other hand...

#CLASS ACT!

Daniel Keogh, email I'm really enjoying *Class*. It's brought something new to the *Doctor Who* universe: youth! Don't get me wrong, I think Peter Capaldi's wonderful, but he's a Gandalf/Dumbledore figure, the wise old wizard (yes, I know he gave us some guitar licks last year, but it did feel a little like your embarrassing dad at times...). And Clara was a teacher, of course. I'm 17 and I want characters I can relate to, people my own age, going through the same kind of problems I am. I've found them in *Class*, thanks to Patrick Ness's brilliant writing and some great

performances from the young cast. It annoys me when older *Who* fans dismiss the show. It's made for my generation, so leave it alone! **SFX** Fair point but youth has always been part of the *Doctor Who* universe – one of the first characters we saw in 1963 was the *Doctor's* “teenage” granddaughter Susan, clicking her fingers to the sound of hot chart sensations John Smith and the Common Men. Given she was also a Coal Hill pupil, just like the kids in *Class*, maybe the show's simply gone full circle?

#ONE FOR THE KIDS

Ryan Gardner, email I was delighted to see that the BBC have recently released loads of classic '70s/'80s television via BBC Store – series like *The Mad Death* and *The Adventure Game*, never commercially available before. Okay, it's disappointing they're not proper DVD releases, but given the shrinking market for those that's probably understandable.

But there are still plenty of treasures left in the BBC archives. For starters, I'd love to see 1990, a political thriller series from 1977/1978, starring Edward “The Equaliser” Woodward as a renegade journalist. Set in a UK run by an Orwellian bureaucracy,



The Adventure Game: top sci-fi!

it'd probably feel even more relevant now... Never seen it, but would love to. The same goes for *Play For Tomorrow*, a series of six futuristic *Play For Todays* which aired in 1982. And a *Captain Zep: Space Detective* release would transport me back to my childhood faster than you can say “Proustian rush”. How about it, BBC? **SFX** Good suggestions all, Ryan. Can we add to the list the pilot for *The Incredible Robert Baldick*, written by Dalek creator Terry Nation, the Victorian *X-Files* that never was? Always wanted to see that. Maybe the BBC should put up an online wishlist? Fans of *Come Back, Mrs Noah*, this is your chance to mobilise...

#RABBIT, RABBIT

David Burton, email I think I can put Medium Atomic Weight out of his misery about the Australian set, myxomatosis-themed bunny film [First Contact: **SFX** 281]. It's

#ANIMORE ANIME?

Ralph Caton, email I'm one of those who read **SFX** to keep in touch with the broad church of genre fiction and pick up pointers to what's interesting. I don't ever write because if it ain't broke... But I've noticed a decrease in the reviews of anime, and this at a time when my particular favourite, *Haibane Renmei* has just come back on the UK market thanks to MVM! It ticks the boxes as a show simple on the outside and deep, deep on the inside, with a truly fantastic setting. Any chance of a review or even a retro feature? Just asking...

SFX Reviews Ed Ian writes: there are all sorts of reasons why we might not review a product. Usually it's down to the sheer volume of releases, or difficulty getting hold of review materials in a timely fashion. We've missed the boat with *Haibane Renmei*, but I do think we could do a bit better when it comes to anime. I'll try harder in 2017!

#FAB FEB!

Kiki Rodgers, online I'm writing in about a horror film I watched recently called *February* (or *The Blackcoat's Daughter* in the US).

EDITORIAL

Editor Richard Edwards, richard.edwards@futurenet.com
Art Editor Jonathan Coates, jonathan.coates@futurenet.com
Art Editor (Film Group) Cliff Newman, cliff.newman@futurenet.com
Production Editor Russell Lewin, russell.lewin@futurenet.com
Features Editor Nick Setchfield, nick.setchfield@futurenet.com
Reviews Editor Ian Berriman, ian.berriman@futurenet.com
News Editor Josh Winning, joshuawinning@yahoo.co.uk
US Editor (East Coast) Tara Bennett, usaeast@sfx.co.uk
US Editor (West Coast) Joseph McCabe, usawest@sfx.co.uk

CONTRIBUTORS

Sam Ashurst, Simon Bland, Saxon Bullock, Paul Cemmick, Nick Chen, Nicola Clarke, Sarah Dobbs, Penny Dreadful, Rhian Drinkwater, Rosie Fletcher, Paul Garner, Matt Glasby, Dave Golder, Nicky Gotobed, David Grove, Stephen Jewell, Stephen Kelly, Paul Kirkley, Matthew Looker, Miriam McDonald, Dave Meikleham, James Mottram, Jayne Nelson, Steve O'Brien, Andrew Osmond, Oliver Pfeiffer, David West, James White, Jonathan Wright

FILM GROUP, LONDON

Editor-in-Chief Jane Crowther **Art Editor** Mike Brennan
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Photography Olly Curtis, Will Ireland

ADVERTISING

Commercial Sales Director Clare Dove, clare.dove@futurenet.com
Advertising Sales Manager Simon Rawle, simon.rawle@futurenet.com
Director of Agency Sales Matt Downs, matt.downs@futurenet.com
Head of Strategic Partnerships Clare Jonik, clare.jonik@futurenet.com
For advertising queries, please contact Steven Pyatt, 01225 687713

MARKETING

Marketing Manager Kristianne Stanton, kristianne.stanton@futurenet.com
Marketing Executive Emma Clapp, emma.clapp@futurenet.com
Direct Marketing Campaign Manager Jemima Crow, jemima.crow@futurenet.com

PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

Production Controller Frances Twentyman, frances.twentymann@futurenet.com
Head of Production UK & US Mark Constance, mark.constance@futurenet.com
Printed in the UK by William Gibbons & Sons on behalf of Future
Distributed in the UK by Marketforce (UK), 2nd Floor, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU
Overseas distribution by Marketforce

LICENSING

International Director Matt Ellis, matt.ellis@futurenet.com
Tel +44 (0)1225 442244

THE SENIOR PARTNERS

Group Art Director Graham Dalzell
Editorial Director Paul Newman
Managing Director, Magazines Division Joe McEvoy

SUBSCRIBE TO SFX

Phone our UK hotline on 0844 848 2852 **International +44 (0)1604 251 045**
Online enquiries www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk
Email sfx@myfavouritemagazines.co.uk

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Tel +44 (0)20 7042 4000 (London)
Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244 (Bath)

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"I have a suitcase full of cravats"



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HERE ARE A FEW OF OUR HIGHLIGHTS:



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It's one of the most beautiful films I've seen this year, but, annoyingly, no one has seen it. While everyone's gawping at the insipid *Blair Witch* sequel and *Don't Breathe*, this hypnotic debut from Oz Perkins (Anthony Perkins' son!) crackles in a forgotten corner of Netflix.

February is a witchy occult drama about two teenage girls living in a boarding school where a mysterious presence grows. It has elements of the haunted house movie, with echoing corridors and lines of empty rooms, and a gorgeous, languid mood that underpins every interaction. The young actresses are also amazing, especially Kiernan Shipka.

It's not fair that *It Follows* and *Stranger Things* are so revered while *February* – which feels like it came from the same mood board – goes ignored. People need to watch it now!

SFX Thanks for the tip-off, Kiki. Anyone else been exploring the forgotten corners of Netflix? What other gems are buried among that soul-sapping landfill of two-star Danny Dyer movies?

#WE ALSO HEARD FROM

Lucy Samson, email The *Doctor Who* "Power Of The Daleks" animation was ace. More, more, more please! In fact Beeb, just do all the missing episodes. Starting with "The Macra Terror".

SFX My vote's for "Fury From The Deep"... Patrick Troughton in a bobblehat vs deadly seaweed? That's entertainment!

Dale Wyatt, email Re: *Red Dwarf*: surely if Rimmer was brought back to keep Lister sane, then Holly would age him in time with Lister, so the age thing works. And of course Kryten is so nice, he'd do the same for his mate! Brilliant season... I love it!

SFX Solid reasoning, Dale! Now can you untangle Brexit?

Mike Garner, email If Andrew Lincoln doesn't win awards for the opening episode of *The Walking Dead* season seven then there is something terribly wrong. He was incredible. JDM ran him close, but Andrew was stunning!

SFX If only there was an Emmy for Outstandingly Gratuitous Use Of A Baseball Bat...

JAMES BOND

How should 007 keep the British end up when he returns to Her Majesty's cinematic service?

Illustration by Paul Garner

Wishlist

WHAT YOU WANT TO SEE IN UPCOMING MOVIES AND TV

Q

Bill Nighy

YOUR TOP 5 REQUESTS

NOW PAY ATTENTION, EON – BRING OUR READERS' DEMANDS TO THE SCREEN OR WE'LL LAUNCH OUR STOLEN ATOMIC WARHEADS AT MIDNIGHT!

BOND, NEW BOND

1 James Bond will return... but who'll be strapping on the shoulder holster? While many of you want Daniel Craig to renew his licence to kill, others are equally keen to see a fresh face. "Idris Elba as Bond!" demands **darthbrowncoat** while **Sam Jennings** wants **Poldark** hunkster Aidan Turner in the tux: "The darkest, most smouldering Bond since Dalton!"

KEEP IT PROFESSIONAL

2 We've seen a bruised, more human Bond over the last few movies – but now you need 007 to eject his emotional baggage. **James King** just wants "a straightforward Bond film" and **Rich Jones** agrees: "Stop the whole damaged, traumatised rubbish. If we wanted realism he'd be an STD-ridden alcoholic crippled by child support payments."

DEADLIER THAN THE MALE

3 Diversity means diverse villainy too, you reckon. The Bond franchise dabbled with a lady villain in 1999's *The World Is Not Enough* but **Leon Coombs** wants "A proper

female opponent. Not someone hiding in plain sight, but out for power from the outset."

Deanne Gerrold wants "Tilda Swinton as the elegant mastermind with Gwendoline Christie as her ball-breaking henchwoman!"

GETTING LAIRY

4 You want the filmmakers to dream bigger when it comes to sinister real estate. "I want to see a villain with a hi-tech base of operations," says **SiMan 1983**. "Imagine one hidden beneath what everyone thinks is a massive shipwreck yard – really it's a complex underwater base that Bond could destroy in the final act." Live and let dive...

Q THE MUSIC

5 **Jeremy McClendon** wants "a score that stands out, a score that would make John Barry proud." **Michelle Pamela Kyle** would like Mark Ronson in charge of the soundtrack – **Andy Kinnear** just wants David Arnold back – while **Dan Dodge** demands "a thumping theme tune – no more slow, whiny ballads!" To the shark tank with you, Sam Smith!

And that's not all they want...

→ **Michel Loutchaninoff** Blofeld, huge secret lairs, DB5, batshit-crazy plan to start WW3 or extort billions from the West, hot Bond girls and a strong female lead.

→ **Chris Batty** A screenwriter that has some idea how to write classic Bond rather than thug Bond.

→ **Michael Donnelly** Maybe Bond should be doing some spying instead of being a superhero...

→ **John O'Malley** A reimagined OHMSS to follow on from *SPECTRE*. Bond on a mission to deal with the escaped Blofeld. Oh, and have Matthew Vaughn direct it.

→ **Jason Burke** We don't need to see him going rogue, or dredge up his past. We just need to see M

send him on a mission that takes him around the world and puts him in peril.

→ **Green Radio** Bryan Cranston can be the bad guy. They haven't had enough Yank bad guys in recent ones.

→ **Simon Litton** No more. 24 films is more than enough. There's nothing new to say or do with the character and they're coasting on nostalgia now.

→ **Jo Traynor** Bill Nighy as a stuffy, old school Q – sorry Ben Whishaw!

→ **Steven Leech** More humour and something like the parachute opening scene from *The Spy Who Loved Me* to make the heart swell with British pride.

→ **Steve Bradley** I want spy shit,

car chases, girls and gadgets. The usual.

→ **Guy Williams** After *The Man From UNCLE* and *The Night Manager* Elizabeth Debicki has to be in line for the Bond girl!

→ **Chris Coghlan** Old school villain, obsessed with world domination or simply blowing up stuff with a solar-powered laser.

→ **Shane Ford** Slow burn. Grounded not gritty. Clever dialogue. Bond character study. Hard R. Not a white guy.

→ **Chris Thomas** Bond vs Predator!

→ **Olive Box** All six – or seven! – Bond actors to be involved somehow, since it'll be the 25th film in the franchise and should be a celebration of that fact.



COMING SOON GAME OF THRONES SERIES 7 AND DEADPOOL 2

Next up it's the seventh season of the *Seventh Kingdom*, followed by the sequel to Ryan Reynolds's scabrous superhero hit. Think!

See bit.ly/newSFXwishlist for details.

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First Contact Feb 2017

YOUR DREAM CAST

JAMES BOND

Aidan Turner

THE HENCHWOMAN

Gwendoline Christie

THE VILLAIN

Tilda Swinton

THE BOND GIRL

Elizabeth Debicki





Penny Dreadful

SFX's high priestess of horror

AN AMERICAN REMAKE IN LONDON

◆ Max Landis is remaking his dad John Landis's masterpiece **An American Werewolf In London**. What an incredibly weird decision all round. You don't need me to tell you that *American Werewolf* is a near-perfect film, groundbreaking in its special effects, one of the very few comedy horrors that manages to be very scary, very funny and steeped in pathos. It does not need to be remade. But redoing your dad's best film? Call a therapist! Max wrote *Chronicle* (ace), *Victor Frankenstein* (flop) and *American Ultra* (no idea, no one saw it) and so far has directed one feature, a romcom called *Me Him Her*. What better time, then, to take on your own dad's crowning glory just to really hammer home how inadequate you are in comparison? John Landis, shame on you for letting your son compete on unfair terms. Max, go remake *Burke & Hare* instead – that way you can't lose.

BLACK IS THE NEW BLACK

◆ I've finally caught up with **Black Mirror** on Netflix – if you haven't watched it yet, do it. Pick of the bunch is "Playtest" – an American tourist trials a VR horror game that taps into his worst fears – which is directed by an exciting new voice in horror, Dan Trachtenberg, who made *10 Cloverfield Lane*. Next best is "Shut Up And Dance" about a boy blackmailed by strangers when his webcam captures footage of him he doesn't want released. *Eden Lake* and *The Woman In Black* director James Watkins heads this one up. All six are effectively nightmarish and a fourth series has already been announced – what a great place for emerging talent to tell a standalone story and get a massive audience. More of this!

ACTION JACKSON

◆ Another Netflix exclusive caught my eye this month purely for the odd title **I Am The Pretty Thing That Lives In The House**. It reminded me of the Shirley Jackson novel *We Have Always Lived In The Castle*, and there's a reason for that. Directed by Oz Perkins (son of *Psycho* star Anthony) it's an atmospheric tale of an ageing female horror writer who lives in a haunted house with a young nurse (Ruth

Competitive fathers and murderous mums this month, plus a real pregnancy horror

Big yawn! *American Werewolf* is getting a remake.



Black Mirror: the future, in more ways than one?



I Am The Pretty Thing... looks good – but perhaps not to her.

Wilson). Spooky as hell, it's packed with Jackson references and explores how a house gains a ghost. Sadly the narrative doesn't really go anywhere, unlike Jackson's stories. I'm a huge fan of hers and just learned that a movie adaption of *We Have Always Lived In The Castle* is on its way from director Stacie Passon, who wrote and directed Will Smith drama *Concussion*. It stars Alexandra Daddario, Taissa Farmiga and Sebastian "Winter Soldier" Stan. The book is extraordinary, about two girls, Merricat and Constance, who live in an isolated house with their uncle Julian. The rest of the family is dead, poisoned by arsenic, and the townsfolk think Constance is responsible. Weird and wonderful; read the novel first.

BABY ON BOARD

◆ "Children these days are really spoilt. It's like, 'Mummy, I want a PlayStation! Mummy, I want you to kill that man.'" **Prevenge**, the feature debut from Alice Lowe, who penned and starred in Ben Wheatley's black comedy *Sightseers*, is a pregnancy horror to keep an eye out for (due 10 February 2017). Lowe plays Ruth, bereaved and pregnant, wreaking revenge on the people she holds responsible for her partner's death, egged on by her unborn child. It's bold and funny – Lowe was seven months pregnant during the shoot and is in every scene. It's got flavours of *Sightseers* with some delicious touches – snakes and spiders in the first scene set us up for what's to come. We've seen pregnancy horror before but never to my knowledge written, directed by and starring an actual pregnant woman. Impressive. ●

Dreadful things to watch

→ Prosecuted as obscene in the early '80s, video nasty *The Burning* (1981) features a horribly burned killer slaughtering summer camp teens with garden shears. It's a cut above your average slasher. If you didn't already snap up the limited edition steelbook, a regular dual-format release is due from Arrow on 19 December.



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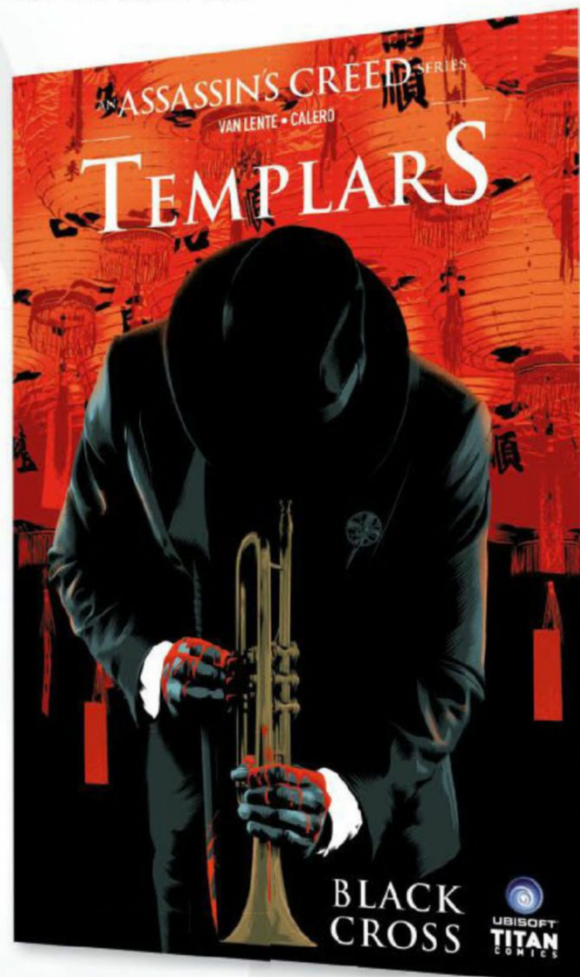
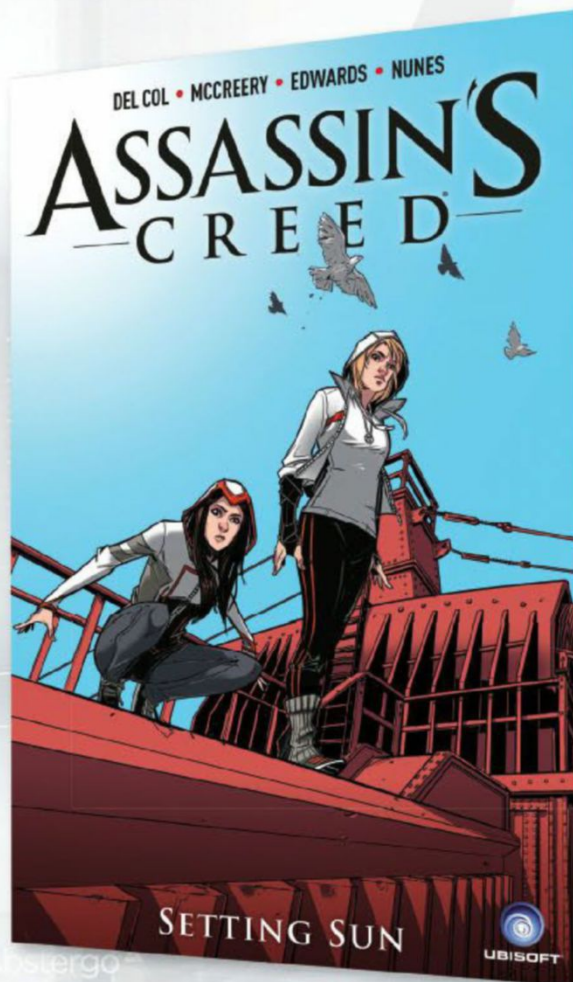
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THE GOD COMPLEX

Author **R Scott Bakker** wonders what future historians will make of our modern-day fantasy



The likes of Tolkien help make sense of our world.

“AT LONG LAST,
SCIENCE HAS
BEGUN
DISENCHANTING
THE HUMAN
HEART”

Historians are forever digging up artefacts and asking what they tell us about the ancient people who made them. We happen to be modern now, but that won't always be the case. So what would a future historian make of something like *The Lord Of The Rings*? What would they think of an ancient text featuring gods and magic – a narrative taking a sacred form – that was neither myth nor scripture? Would they congratulate us for having outgrown gods and magic?

Or would they see us as a culture in crisis?

In his bestselling *Homo Deus: A Brief History Of Tomorrow*, the historian Yuval Noah Harari concludes that our present-day cult of individual meaning is about to come to a crashing end. The more science and technology erase the boundary between us and our tools, the more our shared humanity becomes a consumer whim, the more difficult ascribing meaning to ourselves and our lives becomes.

Think of it in ecological terms. All the tools we use to make sense of ourselves and others evolved in ecologies characterised by profound ignorance. Because we knew nothing of the natural world, we could believe in gods and magic, understand ourselves as characters in shared sacred stories, without fear of contradiction. The importance of these shared sacred stories, Harari argues, lies in the cooperation they make possible. The very possibility of society depends upon them.

So when science began “disenchancing the world”, we had to find some new sacred narrative on pain of social dissolution. Certainly many continued to believe in the traditional stories, but these stories were no longer compulsory, and so no longer universally shared. Some new shared narrative was needed.

So we fell back on the only remaining corner of our ecology still characterised by profound ignorance: ourselves. Where we once listened to inscrutable “gods”, now we listened to our equally inscrutable “hearts”. Where once we followed a script, now we improvised, played the hero of our own stories. Thus the modern narrative form, the stories of individuals struggling to find meaning in an apparently meaningless world, and succeeding to the extent they “listen to their heart”.

And now, at long last, science has begun disenchanting the human heart, the ancestrally inscrutable motivational matrix behind everything we do. What does “Follow your heart” mean when your heart is a neuromarketing stooge, or more radically still, once the rejoinder becomes, “Yes, but which heart?”

The problem is that humans need meaning – so much so, it becomes easy to imagine a semantic apocalypse devolving into a social one. If we lose the ability to find shared meaning in the individual, where will we turn? Harari is uncertain – this is part of what makes *Homo Deus* such an alarming read!

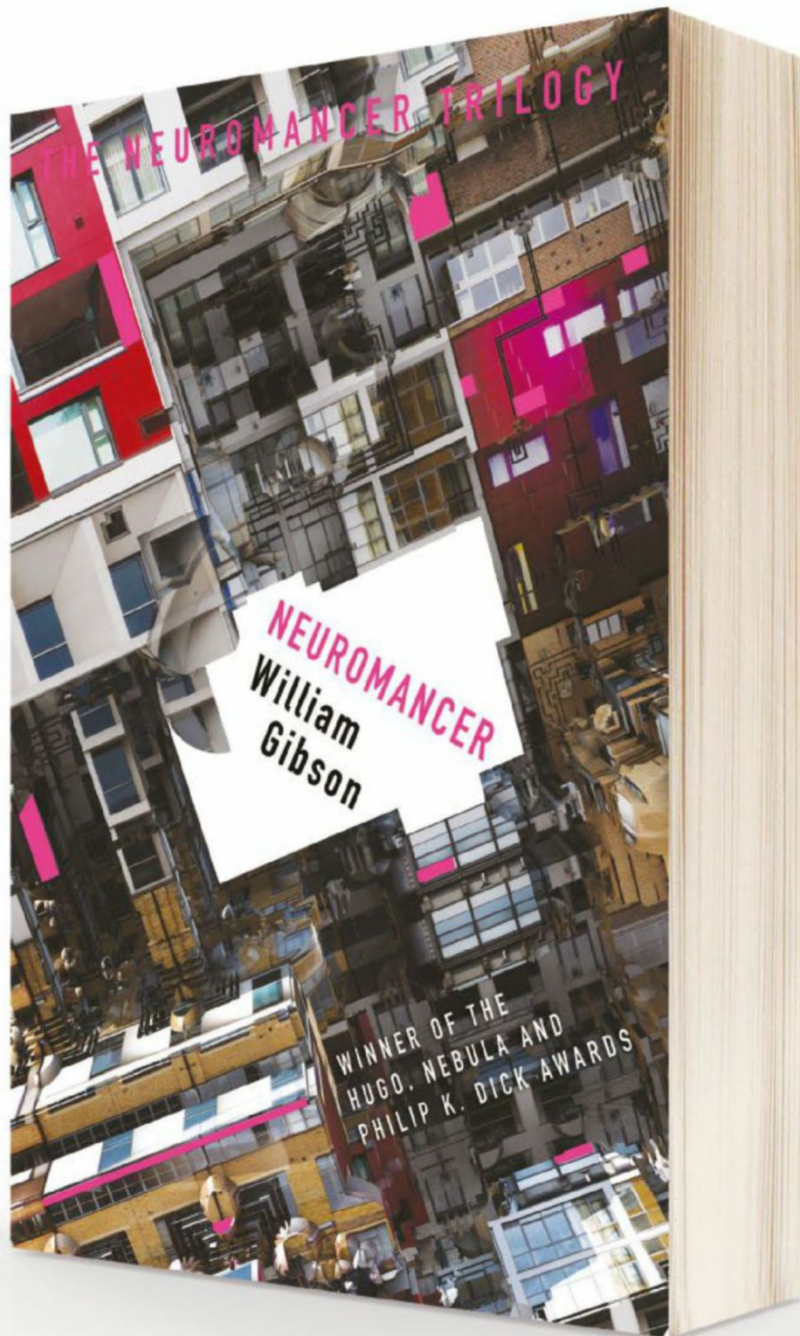
For my part, I think we're already in the process of answering this question. Where there's a need, there's a market. The more scarce meaning becomes in our lives, the more content creators from across the entertainment spectrum will rush in with their wares, gratifying our yen for gods (superheroes) and magic (superpowers) – for meaningful reprieve from an increasingly meaningless world.

Meaning will be simulated. When future archaeologists uncover *The Lord Of The Rings*, they will see it as evidence of a culture in crisis, a narrative version of a wildlife preserve – a place to see what things were like before “progress” destroyed our ancestral cognitive habitats. Middle-earth gives us gods, magic, and moral certainty – the sacred form without the commitment, the belief.

Harari's *Homo Deus* [human god], in other words, will very likely be a geek. ●

R Scott Bakker's The Great Ordeal is out now from Orbit.

**“A masterpiece that moves faster than
the speed of thought and is chilling in its
implications” *The New York Times***



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Winner of the Hugo, Nebula and Philip K. Dick Awards.

OUT NOW IN PAPERBACK AND EBOOK



A FIRE UPON THE DEEP

by Vernor Vinge, 1992

Ken MacLeod recalls a book that was fired up by the early internet



"Vinge has created a galaxy for the readers of the '90s to believe in ... immense, ancient, athrum with data webs, dotted with wonders."
– John Clute

Vernor Vinge made space opera impossible. Then he made it new.

Of all the many enthusiastic responses to *A Fire Upon The Deep*, Clute's is the one that has always stuck in my mind. This long novel is a fast read that rewards a careful re-read with artfully hidden delights. It's a great, sprawling, tightly plotted adventure on a galactic scale with characters that you can care about.

That was its first surprise.

In the 1980s Vinge had brought an electricity pylon crashing down across SF's well-trodden road to the stars. This roadblock was the Singularity: the possibility that we're scarily close to inventing a self-improving AI that (if we're lucky) will merely leave us in its dust. There seemed no place in that future for human adventure.

Others had speculated on this prospect before, but Vinge – also a mathematician and computer scientist – gave the notion unprecedented punch. For space opera writers, finding a way around the Singularity became as big a problem as the limiting speed of light.

Vinge's solution was bold and elegant. He postulates a galaxy partitioned into concentric Zones of Thought: at the core are the Unthinking Depths, where no intelligence is possible; next is the Slow Zone, where brains and computers can function; then the Beyond, where limited AI and FTL travel are possible; and finally the Transcend, where runaway AI can work miracles and theology is an applied science.



Earth is in the Slow Zone – but in our future and the novel's mythic past, a handful of slower-than-light starships blundered into the Beyond. Of these, a few survived to found human colonies. Forty thousand years later, some of their descendants are poking into a dead god's archive. They awaken an ancient evil, a sort of cosmic computer virus called the Blight. A few escape, with an antiviral.

Their headlong flight takes them to the bottom of the Beyond, where a tragic clash with

aliens leaves only two resourceful children to send back news of the antidote. A rescue ship sets out. Agents of the Blight pursue...

The chase is tense, as are the children's struggles in the whirlpools of the aliens' own conflicts. The aliens, the Tines, are a delight to discover. So is Vinge's galaxy, whose complexities we learn in the chase. In both locales, trust is an issue. Treachery is ever-present. Vinge takes these as problems, and shows how they can (imperfectly) be worked around. Wry commentary and plot turns are delivered through the galactic communications web: the Known Net, or the Net of a Million Lies, whose users are entire civilisations.

In 1992, the very existence of the internet was for most people a rumour. Only universities, the military, government institutions and big companies had access. Enthusiastic individual users tended to be computer-literate SF readers with an interest in politics and economics. Vinge was one of them. The newsgroups and mailing lists of that era were the template for his Known Net. This ensured that the book would be widely and passionately discussed by its most receptive readership.

You can still learn a lot of online – and real-life – survival skills from this book, but that's for the patient second read it deserves. Your first read will be as fast and unstoppable as the story, and that's how it should be. ●

Insurgence, the second part of Ken MacLeod's Corporation Wars trilogy, is out now.

Like this? Try these!

A DEEPNESS IN THE SKY
by VERNOR VINGE (1999)

→ A prequel, with an agonising irony that only readers of the first book will get, and a very fine novel in its own right. Fascinating aliens and plausible, terrifying villains.



EXCESSION

by IAIN M BANKS (1996)

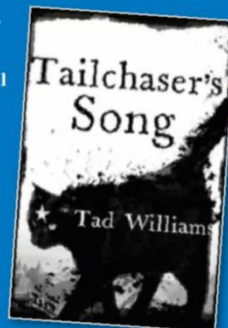
→ An energetic, complex space opera, in which the hitherto irresistible force of a post-scarcity utopia meets an immovable object. Rich in galactic adventure and human warmth.



NEXT ISSUE ↓

In our next Book Club (in *SFX* 283, on sale 4 January), American author Lila Bowen will be writing about 1985 fantasy novel *Tailchaser's Song* by Tad Williams.

Whether you've never read it before or fancy giving it another go, this is your chance to read it before a top writer gives her verdict.



Next Issue

GOTHAM

Batman's still beginning...
Everything you need to know
about season three

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HOLDING OUT FOR A HERO

Truth, justice and the Gallifreyan way? As Steven Moffat tells Nick Setchfield, the Doctor's in for his unlikeliest Christmas yet...





“Can you imagine,” says Peter Capaldi, his lean, pale face creasing into a smile, “if you’re in *Midsomer Murders* you never get the chance to watch someone fly into a skyscraper with a cloak on, pick up a girl and fly with her...”

The TARDIS has never troubled the corpse-littered hamlet of Midsomer but it has arrived in the ancestral home of the superhero. It’s Christmas Eve in New York – or at least an unremarkable September day in Cardiff, where a skyline backdrop of tower blocks and water tanks wraps around a rooftop set in the BBC’s bayside studios. Any day now the *Doctor Who* team will decamp to Bulgaria, where two blocks of an equally make-believe Manhattan stand waiting, ready to double for the city that never sleeps. New York, New York, so good they built it twice...

This unreal real estate is protected by a masked crusader known as the Ghost – part of an eternal love triangle with a mild-mannered guy named Grant and a plucky girl reporter named Lucy. Sound familiar? It should do. This Christmas the Doctor’s plunging full-tilt into the spandex-wrapped realm of superpowers and secret identities. It’s a collision every bit as improbable as the Time Lord trading clues with John Nettles in the murder capital of England.

As writer and showrunner Steven Moffat tells *SFX* in an exclusive interview, “The Return Of Doctor Mysterio” is *Doctor Who* filtered through the lens of comic book cinema. “It’s a good thing to watch on Christmas Day,” he grins. “A big superhero movie! Hopefully it’s a good family blockbuster for Christmas Day...”

Stash your sonic in your utility belt. Prepare the popcorn. Up, up and away we go... ➔



As Christmas presents go,
better than a piece of coal.



Young Grant (Logan
Hoffman) – related to
a lad known as Potter?



Some of the best conversations happen in this setting.

So why superheroes?

🔗 We'd been trying to solve the problems of another script, during the run. I'd pitched the idea of the Doctor meeting a superhero. It didn't fly at all and was happily forgotten. And then Brian [Minchin, producer] said, "That idea you had – if we made that the Christmas special, kids would love it." I like superheroes – I'm not a huge aficionado, I don't know my comic books that well, but I like them.

What appeals to you about the superhero myth?

🔗 The secret identity thing! I've always loved the idea of the guy who's apparently a wimp who's secretly a god, in love with a girl. He cannot admit that he's the man the woman he loves loves, because he loves her too much. I've always adored that. The tone of this special, I suppose, comes from that original

Christopher Reeve Superman movie, which is unashamed. Sometimes your modern superhero movies feel as though they're made by people who don't really like superheroes. They're dark and gritty and oh, isn't it a sombre and difficult thing to be a superhero... of course it arsing isn't! It's great! You've got superpowers, and a Bat Cave, so shut up!

Were the Christopher Reeve Superman movies a touchstone for you?

🔗 I went back and I watched the first two. They're so happy and unashamed. With modern Superman they've toned down his costume and Lois Lane knows who he is, and you think well, that's all so wrong! You can't do Superman as if you're ashamed of it.

“It's great to be a superhero! You've got superpowers and a Bat Cave, so shut up!”



Superman is inherently absurd. You've got to wear that damn costume and stand there and look impressive.

Jimmy Olsen got a bullet in the head in the last Superman movie...

🔗 Did he really? Outrageous. You can't do that [laughs]!

You've given this a wonderful pulpy title. Is it a satire of superheroes or a celebration?

🔗 The pulpy title is actually a reference to the fact that *Doctor Who* is called *Doctor Mysterio* in Mexico. And Peter Capaldi loves saying "Doctor Mysteriooooo!" Is it a satire? No, because I think satires are boring. Satires work for five minutes. They don't work for a whole hour.

Superheroes and *Doctor Who* always felt like two worlds that could never collide. How do you make them fit?

🔗 The joy of it is that they don't fit. There are comic books in the *Doctor Who* universe – he's heard of Batman and Superman, he knows about them. He just thinks of them as fictional characters. We do address all that – it's not like we suddenly announce that this is a physical reality of his world. Of course, because of the particular nature of *Doctor Who* as a show, we're probably more interested in the Clark





The Ghost gets to grips with a potential wrong 'un.



Nardole and a baby: not easy to tell apart.

Kent half of things than the superhero half of things. But then I always think that's where those films really triumph. It's not the second unit material, where someone in a tight costume flies around, it's actually in the guy who's having to manage a life where he's a part-time god. That's always been the fun part of it, and when they lose track of that it's not as much fun.

Did the story absolutely demand to be set in New York?

❖ It didn't – it's just the place you want to see a superhero movie set. The Christopher Reeve Superman movies are clearly set in New York, even though they call it Metropolis, and Gotham has always been a sort of overgrown New York... It feels like the city they were drawing in those comics.

So why did you film this in Bulgaria?

❖ I know, it's great, isn't it [laughs]? The reality is, if you go to real New York, you're having to close streets. And once you're down on street level it's the same bunch of chain stores you see anywhere else. We can shoot a very convincing New York – and we have – without setting foot outside Wales. We found this fantastic New York set in Bulgaria, and it looks more New York than New York. It's incredibly convincing. And it sort of looks like proper movie New York. It's the one you know from the movies as ➔

MYSTERIO'S WAYS

It's another blue box Christmas for Peter Capaldi

Are you a superhero fan?

❖ Not really particularly my thing. I liked the early Christopher Reeve movies – this is tonally quite similar. The superhero movies I've seen recently seem to be a little serious. Of course I loved *Batman* when I was a kid, with Adam West and all that. When I was a kid that was absolutely huge. Everybody loved *Batman* – “Pow! Wallop! Crash!” and all that stuff. That was really exciting.



saying this – Matt sort of looks like an alien. In his comic work he has a very distinctive look about him but in *Doctor Who* he genuinely looks like a creature from another planet, with his pale, sweet face and his clear eyes. I was quite amazed looking at us together. We look like a

pair of strange alien creatures. Which is nice.

Has this felt like a very different year for you, not being on television screens?

❖ The funny thing is that I seem to be recognised more now, even though the show's not on. I can't figure out how that works. I don't know whether it's because it's available on DVD or whether it nudges into the public consciousness more. But that's what I find strange. It doesn't seem to diminish when you're not on. Not that I don't like being well known, it's very nice, but some days you'd just like to quietly pop to the shops. But no, it seems to be as potent as ever.

At least it's given your knee time to repair...

❖ Yeah, that was useful. I needed a knee operation because I ripped it chasing Zygons. We couldn't stop because there's a certain recovery time with the operation, and that was the middle of filming, so we just had to carry on. Once we finished I had it done. The doctors always say, “Oh, you'll be running around in two weeks”, but you're never running around in two weeks. It was about four or five weeks before I was able to hobble around on a stick – which I loved. It was very glamorous and theatrical! My wife had to stop me buying one with a gold demon's head on the top!

Did you grow up reading superhero comics?

❖ I didn't particularly. My granny used to bring me *Casper The Friendly Ghost* comics... I guess we had *TV21* and *Thunderbirds* and the Frank Bellamy drawings and *Doctor Who* in *TV Action* and *TV Comic*. That was more what I looked at, as opposed to American comic books.

What appealed to you about this story?

❖ To have this fairly naive Clark Kent/Lois Lane kind of relationship is a wonderful sort of relief. It's very light and very funny and of course Steven writes it beautifully – it's full of very ironic gags and comic book gags. The cast that we have are playing it beautifully. It's very enjoyable to watch. I love being in scenes with them because a lot of it is about their relationship, and the almost farcical element of having to hide his superhero persona. Steven writes it very beautifully. It's like a little Swiss watch, it all has to work beautifully, and he does that. I've enjoyed it very much.

What's it like working with Matt Lucas again?

❖ Matt's great, he's very funny. When I see him on screen – and I don't know whether he'll like me

"I DIDN'T WANT TO STEP INTO SPANDEX AGAIN!"

Justin Chatwin is Grant aka The Ghost



So who's Grant?

He's a nanny by day, superhero by night. He has to plate-spin saving people and saving New York City and while he's doing that he has a baby monitor clipped under the back of his belt...

What about the script stood out for you?

It's smart. It's all subtextual. It's funny but it's emotional too. The characters are never saying what they're doing or doing what they're saying. You have to say every word exactly as Steven wrote it or else it won't work.

Did you prep by watching superhero movies?

Ed [Bazalgette, director] recommended that I watched the Tobey Maguire *Spider-Man* and the first two *Supermans*. And then on the plane over I watched one of those new Marvel films like *Civil War* and I fell asleep within 15 minutes. I get exhausted from high action.

Do you have to be confident to step out in a superhero outfit? Or does it give you confidence?

Oh, you can be the most insecure human being and you put that outfit on and you're just charging life. You can be slouching and still look like a hero in that outfit.

Is it a childhood dream to play a superhero?

No, I played a superhero in a Fox movie once and it was just traumatic. I didn't want to step into spandex again. It was just never my thing, but it seems to be a lot of people's thing.

This was a funny, comical, lighthearted way to play a superhero. It makes fun of it in a way.



Is Lucy facing the fella pictured just below?



No fancy space guns here.

opposed to the one that has all the same shops you're used to seeing on your own high street.

The flying sequences are always crucial in superhero movies. Was that the biggest FX challenge, given you don't have a Marvel-style budget but you still have to deliver Christmas Day blockbuster spectacle?

➔ You don't have to do a superhero movie to be stuck in this predicament with *Doctor Who*. It's automatically and unironically compared to the big budget movies. The moment we have a spaceship or a monster we're in that situation. We cannot do it on the scale that a major movie

can – but that does mean that our action scenes aren't hideously bloated to the point where you're nodding off during them. Our limitations are how much effects work we have, not how good they will be, because they will be good. I say that with the confidence of someone who hasn't seen a frame of it yet... but it will be good. And now there's the technology to do these things pretty damn well without costing the earth. If you look at the original Christopher Reeve *Superman* it was amazing at the time but it comes down to "You will believe a man's costume will turn green when he flies..." Brilliant at the time, but nowhere near what they can routinely do now. In fact Peter

BIFF! POW! WHO?

The Doctor's other comic book crossovers

➔ Tom Baker empties his seemingly infinite pockets in "The Talons Of Weng-Chiang" – and one of the items is a Corgi toy Batmobile.

➔ When someone disses the TARDIS in 1970's "Inferno", the Third Doctor retorts, "What did you expect? Some kind of space rocket with Batman at the controls?"



➔ Patrick Troughton tale "The Mind Robber" gave us the Karkus, comic strip hero of *The Hourly Telepress*, brought to life in the surreal Land of Fiction.

➔ Pop culture-obsessed companion Ace is wearing a dangly Batman earring in 1988 adventure "Remembrance Of The Daleks".

➔ Issue 79 of Marvel's *Power Man And Iron Fist* teams the urban defenders with time-travelling eccentric Professor Gamble to battle deadly robot race the Dredlox ("Incinerate!").



Time to call IT?

Bennett, our producer, worked on the flying sequences on the original Superman movie! He said it was very boring, actually. You don't know you're making cinematic history at the time – you're just hanging a handsome unknown actor from a rig!

This is the first *Doctor Who* we've seen for an entire year. Is the show too big to ever drift out of public consciousness? Or can you never take that for granted?

☉ I don't think a year is a problem for it at all – the evidence of *Sherlock* is that maybe it's quite good to starve people from time to time, make them wait for it. But no, you absolutely cannot take it for granted. Or rather, you want people to think they can, and then worry them

“We work very hard on *Doctor Who*, on making sure people are talking about it”

slightly... We work very hard on *Doctor Who*, when it's around, on making sure people are talking about it. If there comes a spell where, for a few episodes, we're not quite as good at it – which has happened from time to time – you can see it drift down a bit. You have to very actively get people back talking. It's also a harder thing to assess now, isn't it? Yet again I'm heading towards a lifestyle where I have to explain that the overnights don't really mean anything at all... That is so overwhelmingly through now, when Netflix won't even tell you how many people watch their shows! In terms of cultural impact *Doctor Who* managed 16 years off the air and was still a headline event when it came back. It's pretty solidly there – but we work very hard at it.

And of course we've got series 10 to look forward to as well. What's exciting you about next year's episodes?

☉ I think there's some cracking episodes. And then there's Pearl [Mackie]. It's so true that because *Doctor Who* has two lead characters, not just one, when you change either one of them it becomes a massively different show. And Pearl makes it a massively different show. It feels like a different world from when Clara was in it, which felt different from Amy, from Donna, from Rose Tyler... I think you're going to love her. She's really strong and it's just really fun to have somebody in the show who's →

“THERE'S AN ELEMENT OF LOIS LANE”

Charity Wakefield
is Lucy



So who you are playing?

I play Lucy Fletcher, who lives and works in New York City. She's a journalist, so I'm watching you with beady eyes to see what you do! I'm giving her just a slight New York accent for that hustle bustle feel.

Is she a Lois Lane figure, then?

There's an element of Lois Lane, definitely.

Steven's known for writing strong, sassy female characters. What does he give you, as a writer?

He gives her a lot of wit and repartee, which is really fun to play in the lovely old film sense of it. There's a lot of great banter. She's quite a fast talker, and her and Grant have got a lot of lovely scenes together where they go back and forth. There's definitely a kind of New York feel about that dialogue.

What does *Doctor Who* mean to you?

I've definitely grown up with it. My dad is a huge sci-fi geek and loves *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*. We have thousands of old school video tapes in our house. Shelves and shelves and shelves and he won't let them go, even though I've given him DVDs! It's definitely very important in our household. I really didn't see them as a kid but my dad was watching reruns of them and I got into them through him.

How's he going to react?

My dad is going to explode when I tell him about this, I'm not going to lie. All of these elements coming together! He'll be sad that I'm not dressed in a Dalek outfit. That would be really, truly the cherry on the Christmas cake.

“HE’S NOT QUITE WHAT HE SEEMS TO BE!”

Matt Lucas isn't just for Christmas. Steven Moffat on the return – and the future – of Nardole...



He's going to be quite unexpected for people. Matt's obviously a very clever actor, and he's extremely funny, but when we had him in for last year's Christmas special it was sort of rent-a-duffer! I was quite surprised when we realised we could get him for that part. And he turns up and makes a tiny little part into something much bigger than it actually was. I was surprised he did it! So he comes back with all of that broad stuff still going on, but it's a well rounded character. He's much slyer and cleverer, and as the series progresses you realise he plays quite a significant role in the Doctor's life in terms of keeping him in line. He's the only one who's allowed to kick his arse. So he's not quite what he seems to be. He's very happy to appear to be the duffer to the outside world but he's not. He's a really clever guy, which makes sense – he was working for River and River wouldn't have had him around if he wasn't useful. I know people raised their eyebrows when we brought him in but I think you're going to love him. He gets quite moving at times.

We haven't just done what we did with him in “Husbands Of River Song”, in his two scenes! We have taken it on, in ways that are consistent with what you saw, but not bound by it at all.

There's a lot of broad comedy in *Doctor Who*, and I know that makes some people worry – and when he does that he's broad and it's fun and very funny. But most of the time *Doctor Who* isn't doing that. He can play a serious scene as well as anyone can – and he's quite interested in doing that, because he doesn't get to do it very much!



Somehow that surgeon doesn't look very comforting...

completely unfamiliar with all the mythology of *Doctor Who*. Somebody who can go around questioning things. It makes the show feel new.

Is it a very different dynamic to Peter and Jenna?

🔗 Peter had great chemistry with Jenna but that was very, very different. There was always something quite regal about Jenna – there certainly is now that she's Queen Victoria! She was always very refined as Clara. You always felt that she could possibly be a Time Lady herself. In an absolutely charming way the two of them looked as though they were off on a different world with each other whereas Pearl as Bill is much earthier and is really quite insistent that she has her own life, in addition

to the Doctor. And the Doctor gets booted out of it if he sticks his nose in. With Clara, you always knew, whatever she was up to, with Danny Pink or whatever, that she, in the end, was going to nip into the phone box. It's not quite the same with Bill. It's a very, very different feeling. And they're very, very funny with each other. They're a real double act.

You're entering your final phase of *Who*. Is there something satisfying about building towards that big ending?

🔗 Well, there is – but that was more last year, bizarrely enough! I always get the timing wrong... I did think for quite a long while that last year might have been my last one. I was tying things off, getting the Doctor and River to Darillium and doing all the things I'd said I'd do. In this series, quite pleasantly I'm just treating it like it's a new show. To leave like it's all just beginning is probably more fun than doing some kind of farewell tour. I've finally come up with the idea of what I want to do for my very last one, which will be fun. So this is one more tour of duty but it feels new, and when you see it it'll feel like a new iteration of *Doctor Who*. It doesn't feel like an epic sunset or anything. It's the show starting up again, which is what *Doctor Who* is best at. ●

“I've finally come up with the idea of what I want to do for my very last story”



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SAMUEL BARNETT

The Brit actor who's taking Douglas Adams's *Dirk Gently* stateside

Words by Richard Edwards /// Photography by: Mitch Jenkins

It's fair to say that anyone who's read Douglas Adams's *Dirk Gently* novels would be unlikely to picture the man now playing the holistic detective on TV in the role. "When I was auditioning for the part and reading the books, I was thinking, 'I look nothing like how I picture *Dirk Gently*,'" laughs Samuel Barnett. "He's older than me, he's quite portly, quite scruffy, he wears this big overcoat..."

But *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*, the new BBC America adaptation that's landing in the UK on Netflix this month, is like no incarnation of the character we've seen before. Relocating *Dirk* to Seattle, the eight-part series has been reimagined by *Chronicle* scripter Max Landis – though *Dirk's* methods still focus on the interconnectedness of all things. "I know my *Dirk* is a little different," Barnett admits, "but what Max Landis has done is absolutely capture the spirit of *Dirk*, the way *Dirk's* mind works, and the way his universe works."

The show's set in Seattle, but you're playing a British *Dirk*. Was he always supposed to hail from the UK?

☺ I have to say I do not know the answer, and I would be intrigued to know. For me it seems kind of essential if you're going to adapt *Dirk* that you keep him as British. In a way I think the TV picks up from where the third book, that I know was incomplete, left off – at the end of the third book, *Dirk* is on a plane to America to solve a case, and I feel like Max has kind of picked up from that point onwards.

The show is incredibly fast-paced, with lots of things going on. Was it hard keeping track of everything?

☺ Yeah, it was at first. I definitely spent a long time getting my head around it. Because the whole point of this show is that absolutely everything is connected and interconnected, stuff that's happening in episodes one, two, three and four sometimes didn't make sense to me until I read episode eight. This is the kind of show where you will be able to go back to the beginning if you want and view it in a completely different way.

Having played him for a season, do you think *Dirk* is a genius, a bumbler or somewhere in between?

☺ I think he thinks he's a genius detective! I don't think anyone else does. I think he's the most incompetent TV detective that we've got, but I also think you're right that it's probably somewhere in between, because I also think he's a

genius in the sense that he has a very particular talent that nobody else has. He believes that when he is given a case, every single thing that happens, no matter how disconnected it seems, will eventually lead him to a solution. If that's not genius I don't know what is. But his methods are so terrible. He's got all the clues but doesn't know what to do with them. I like to think of him as stupidly brilliant and brilliantly stupid.

The dynamic with his reluctant new sidekick, Todd [played by Elijah Wood], is also unconventional...

☺ What you've got is a detective who is absolutely no good at detecting, and a sidekick who does not want to be a sidekick, who has no interest in being a detective and actually just wishes to be left alone. You look at those two and you think it's amazing that they ever manage to do anything. But I think that's the point of the whole thing, that the universe has decided that these two people will be the ones [solving the mystery].

Does *Dirk* share any traits with other TV detectives?

☺ What I loved about what Douglas Adams created with *Dirk Gently* is that he made a very original detective who is unlike any other I've seen. I think Max has continued that in this series. Inevitably, I've seen on social media that there have been comparisons, certainly to Matt Smith as Doctor Who, the way I play it, and to *Sherlock*, which is totally fine – I think that may be about the speech rhythms. But *Dirk* and the way he works, he couldn't be more different to *Sherlock*. He's just a mass of intuition and gut instinct, I don't know how often he engages his brain, whereas *Sherlock* is all kinds of intellect.

You were one of the original *History Boys*, and you and many of your co-stars [including James Corden, Dominic Cooper and Russell Tovey] have since gone on to big things. Was there a sense at the time that this was a group destined for greatness?

☺ Oh god no, not at all [laughs]! We were just thrilled to be working at the National with [writer] Alan Bennett and [director] Nick Hytner. Nick Hytner says that we thought it would do a very dry run of maybe 80 shows, and that would be it, and it obviously went on to do so much more than that and provided a platform for all the original eight boys... There's no doubt that obviously there's a lot of talent in that cast, but I think this industry is so much about exposure and being in the right place at the right time. God, I'm so proud of all of them with what everyone's gone on to do. ●

Dirk Gently is on Netflix from 11 December.

Biodata

Occupation

→ Actor

Born

→ 25 April 1980

From

→ Whitby

Greatest Hits

→ *Penny Dreadful*, *Jupiter Ascending*, *Beautiful People*, *Crooked House*, *The History Boys*

Random Fact

→ Like his fellow *History Boys*, Barnett had a cameo in Nicholas Hytner's *The Lady In The Van*.

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PARTICULAR
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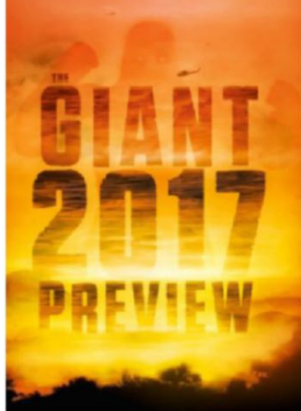


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KILLING

Historical
murder
simulator
**ASSASSIN'S
CREED** is
taking a leap of
faith on the big
screen. Jordan
Farley goes
under the hood
with director
Justin Kurzel

September 2015, and *SFX* is sweating like a cinema hot dog on the scorching Maltese set of mega-budget videogame adaptation *Assassin's Creed*. Today Fort Manoel in Valletta is doubling for 15th century Spain, where Michael Fassbender's robed Assassin, Aguilar de Nerha, and several of his hooded brethren are about to be burnt at the stake by their mortal enemies, the Templars. As the flames erupt and the 600-strong crowd of religious zealots bay for blood the effect is complete; we've Quantum Leaped into the past... until a cutting edge drone camera takes to the skies to capture aerial shots, shattering the illusion.

The past colliding with the future will be familiar to fans of *Assassin's Creed* – a series that combines detailed recreations of real historical locales with a contemporary(ish) meta-narrative involving secret societies, apocalyptic prophecies, ancient civilisations, ancestral memories unlocked through DNA and the snazziest sci-fi recliner since *The Matrix*. For the film, the Animus, the machine that allows death row inmate Callum Lynch (Fassbender again) to relive the memories of his Assassin ancestor Aguilar, has had an upgrade: it's now a giant, prehensile mechanical arm. Confused already? Worry not. *Assassin's Creed* may have big ambitions for a blockbuster, but the filmmakers – among them acclaimed *Macbeth* director Justin Kurzel and Fassbender, who is producing for the first time on *Creed* – have gone to great lengths →

TIME

“It's much more grey and it's much more complex than goodies and baddies”

to craft a film not just for fans, but for viewers new to a world of hidden blades and vertiginous swan dives into carts full of hay.

“In a 100-minute film, you've really got to try to not overload people with too much exposition,” Kurzel tells *SFX* in a dusty antechamber during a break. As a newbie to the game himself, Kurzel is better placed than most to keep proceedings streamlined. “It wasn't until Michael asked me to take a look at it that I started to really understand the scope and breadth of *Assassin's Creed* and what it meant to many people.”

NO ONE EXPECTS...

Fassbender was the first to sign up for the film after game-makers Ubisoft approached him directly to play their first big-screen Assassin – a character who has yet to feature in any of the games. While the script was being fine-tuned, Fass fled to the Scottish Highlands to film Shakespeare adap *Macbeth* for Kurzel, alongside future *Creed* co-star Marion Cotillard. Evidently a fruitful collaboration, it was here that Fassbender suggested Kurzel for the killer gig.

“We talked to a lot of directors,” says veteran producer Frank Marshall, who boasts *Indiana Jones* and *Jurassic Park* among his credits. “Once we talked with [Justin] we saw that he

had a very clear vision of what he wanted to do with the film.” But the question was, could Kurzel handle the leap from verse-perfect Shakespeare adaptations to a tentpole blockbuster? “I just went through this with Colin Trevorrow on *Jurassic World*,” Marshall continues. “Where people say, ‘How can you bring somebody in who's just done one little movie?’ Well, so long as you surround them and their vision with an experienced crew it's definitely possible to make an exciting movie.”

Though the film takes place in the same universe as the games, the Spanish Inquisition was chosen as the backdrop for the historical sequences precisely because it hasn't featured in the games, something Kurzel felt was essential to set the film apart. Every actor in the three “regression” sequences speaks Spanish – including Fassbender – but as a Brotherhood of action rather than words, the Assassins spend their time ass-kicking rather than soliloquising. “They're all part of a creed that is being persecuted by the Inquisition,” Kurzel explains. “They're protective of an artefact that within it holds the key to free will. All of them are prepared to sacrifice for that. So they're very... ruthless.”

Ruthless? Prepared to sacrifice? Are the Assassins really the heroes they purport to be? “What I love about *Assassin's Creed* is it's not saying the Assassins are good and the Templars are bad,” Kurzel posits. “It's really about two different factions desperately believing in something – the Assassins' free will and the Templars' control – and trying to find ways of victory against each other. As an audience watching the two ideologies, I think that you can waver between both. So it's much more grey and it's much more complex than goodies and baddies.” →



Just taking in the scenery.



KNIVES OUT

Michael Fassbender goes for the kill

Were you familiar with the games before signing up?

I'd never played the game when we started in 2011. I sat down with the guys from Ubisoft, and they introduced me to this whole universe. I mean, I'd seen billboards and trailers and whatnot. So they started to fill me in on the whole philosophy of the universe and I just found it fascinating.

What are the key differences between Callum and Aguilar?

Callum's somebody who's a little adrift, without a compass, in the way of his life. He doesn't feel like he belongs to anything very much. He's an outcast. And Aguilar is somebody who very much belongs to something. His life belongs to the creed of right and good. And he's very focused. Much like a samurai, he serves that cause. His whole life is driven for that cause. Callum's life is more of a discovery to him but Aguilar does belong to something.

How do you balance making a film for fans and people new to *Assassin's Creed*?

You really respect the core elements of the game. Number one, because they work really well, and number two, because you don't want to alienate that fan base. And because it's such a dense world, for a new audience we wanted to make it as simple as possible. The Animus, DNA memory, the philosophies between Templars and Assassins and the artefact – that's enough to be dealing with.



Michael Fassbender's Callum is saved from death row – but was that a good thing?



Marion Cotillard plays scientist Sophia Rikkin.



WEIRD SCIENCE

Marion Cotillard is saving the future

What is your relationship with the games?

No relationship at all. I don't like games where you kill people! No offence to all the people who love it. But this is different. There is a real idea behind the script.

Did you do any research to get up to speed?

One of my best friends is a big fan, like one of the biggest. She played all the games and everything. She told me about the game. And I did a little bit of research about the Templars. But what I thought was very interesting is exploring the mind of a scientist who thinks that she can cure violence with a mix of science and items and ideas of the past.

Was reuniting with Justin and Michael after *Macbeth* part of the appeal?

Justin is such an amazing director for actors. One of the greatest I've worked with. So I knew that this was the kind of adventure where it's like a big studio, a big movie based on a big videogame, but at the same time, it would be something very intimate and very profound. And obviously working with Michael - he's such an amazing and committed actor.

Do you enjoy working on genre films?

That's what I love about movies. I like to be part of very realistic projects, and then suddenly you jump into a totally different kind of reality. Here you have all kinds of science fiction ideas that I thought were really cool and interesting.

Good or bad: one thing's for sure, the Brotherhood know how to take care of themselves. With parkour skills and balletic combat abilities, action has always been an important component of the games. One of Kurzel's guiding principles was to maintain a refreshing level of realism in the hand-to-hand combat and death-defying stunts. Among them: one of the game's signature Leaps of Faith, performed for real from a 125ft platform by stuntman Damien Walters. "That's always been our aim," asserts Kurzel. "Because what's amazing about the games is that they're not superheroes. They're people that have come from a school of tradition. It's really important to embrace the humanity in it, and also what's possible so that it feels like a piece of cinema rather than a heightened, impossible world."

But in *Assassin's Creed*, the historical sequences are only half the story. In fact, in the film they're less than half of the story, with the majority of the runtime dedicated to the film's parallel present-day plot. Here, the life of Fassbender's Callum Lynch spirals out of control when his mother is brutally murdered by his own father (Brendan Gleeson) while Callum is still a child. After leading a violent life Callum ends up on death row, where he's saved from lethal injection by Abstergo scientist Sophia Rikkin (Marion Cotillard) and her father Alan Rikkin (Jeremy Irons). Unfortunately for Callum, Abstergo is a front for the modern day Templars, who need Callum to find the powerful artefact Aguilar and his fellow Assassins were working to protect.

Fassbender's blood relations may have a shared history of violence, but otherwise they're very different people. At least at first. "The film is kind of about violence, and about the responsibility of violence," Kurzel says. "I think that's what interesting about Cal. He doesn't know who he is or what he is or where he's come from. The film is about slowly, bit by bit, understanding that he is part of something really quite huge, and he has always been part of a tribe. That's quite a powerful idea – for someone who is a lone wolf to suddenly



"They're behind you!"

understand that he is part of something much greater than him. That was a huge part of why I was interested in the story."

NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT

The clinical sterility of Abstergo – essentially a concrete prison masquerading as a medical facility in Madrid – stands in stark contrast to the sun-kissed beauty of 15th century Spain. But Kurzel didn't want the two halves of the film to feel entirely distinct, something he addressed through the "bleeding effect", where Callum's memories of Aguilar seep their way into the present day via hallucinations and visions. This helps Callum learn the killer skills of his Assassin ancestor, while putting him under increasingly dangerous psychological strain. "The real challenge is how you breach the present and the past," Kurzel says. "We have many devices that we've worked into the present that almost feel as though the history of the film is shadowing the present day. Even

the Animus is built in an old Templar church. They're surrounded by the weaponry of past Assassins and past murals of Templars. I wanted a space where you could put something very modern in, which is this Animus machine we've created, but for it all to seem connected to some sense of history and place in the past."

Thanks to the Animus, *Assassin's Creed* also has an in-built sequel machine as – theoretically – Callum can "memory travel" to any location and time in history. Little surprise then that Kurzel and co are already considering sequel possibilities. "I think it's really dependent on the success of this one," Kurzel confides. "But obviously, like the game, there's many possibilities to send Assassins into different periods and different times. We've definitely discussed the ideas of where you could take the story and where you could take the lead character, Cal. There's a lot of fertile ground there." ●

Assassin's Creed opens on 1 January.

BACK IN THE GAME

A whirlwind tour of *Assassin's Creed* history

In 2009 developers Ubisoft took a huge leap of faith with *Assassin's Creed*. Built upon a brain-bending concept – what if we could relive the memories of our ancestors – the colossal open world stealth game was a huge investment. It paid off commercially, if not creatively – the first game praised for its ambition rather than its execution. The sequel, *Assassin's Creed II*, was quick to

deliver on the first game's gargantuan promise, telling the epic tale of Italian Assassin Ezio Auditore da Firenze. Released like clockwork annually, six main games (and a raft of spin-offs) have followed since, each showcasing a different Assassin and historical setting, from colonial America to Victorian London. At the same time, in contrast to the film, the contemporary sequences became

less of a focus – from action-packed setpieces about a technologically advanced ancient society and an apocalyptic prophecy, to brief, non-interactive cut-scenes. Throughout, the key appeal of the games has remained unchanged – the ability to explore a beautifully realised historical locale while stabbing evil Templars through the jugular. What more could you ask for?



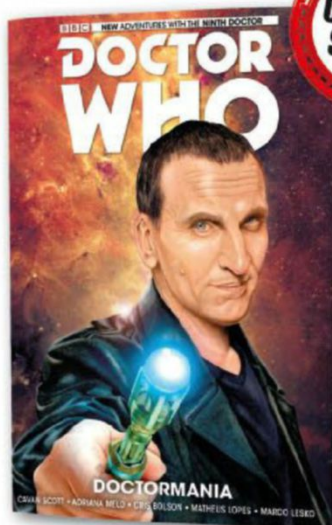
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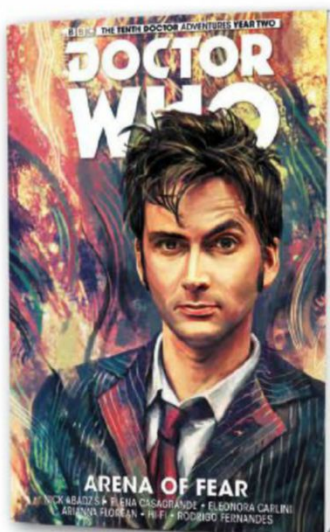
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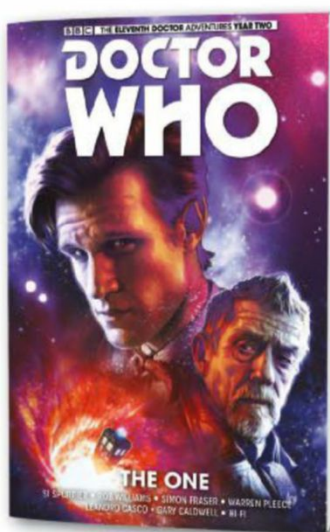
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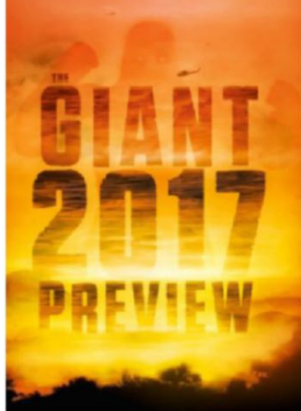


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Gonna need a bigger gun, Tom.

LOGAN

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'...

2
MAR

All good things come to an end and, despite his impressive regenerative abilities, that's sadly true even for the mighty Wolverine. "I kind of have in my head what we're going to do in this last one," Hugh Jackman said earlier this year of taking a final bow as the clawsome mutant. "It just feels like this is the perfect way to go out." Not that you can blame him. The Aussie actor's been playing Wolverine for 17 years, appearing as the character in nine films, so it's no surprise he's feeling a bit of a creak in his adamantium hips.

That would certainly explain the apocalyptic feel to *Logan*, Jackman's third solo outing as Wolverine. Loosely based on fan-favourite comic *Old Man Logan*, the film (again directed by James Mangold) sees a retired Logan caring for Professor X (Patrick Stewart) when the appearance of a young mutant (Dafne Keen) prompts him to enter the fray one last time. With Stewart also hinting this is the last time he'll play Prof X, it's looking like the end of an era for your favourite X-Men. "It's going to be very different," Jackman says of the threequel. "Hopefully different to anything we've done." **JW**



KONG: SKULL ISLAND

THE BEAST IS BACK...

10
MAR

"Our Kong is by far the biggest Kong that you've seen on screen," teases director Jordan Vogt-Roberts of the beast at the centre of this franchise refresh. Well, he'd have to be, considering *Kong: Skull Island* will be followed up by *Godzilla Vs Kong* in 2020. Before the great ape clashes with the god of destruction, though, he'll be looking to paste Tom Hiddleston, Brie Larson and John Goodman in the monstrous icon's first big-screen rumble since Peter Jackson's 2005 remake. They play explorers in the 1970s who navigate their way through remote Pacific islands, stumbling across the titular fella along the way (well, he's pretty hard to miss). "It was such an epic shoot. You will really feel how this was not shot on a soundstage," Hiddleston says of filming in the jungles and valleys of Hawaii, Vietnam and Australia, and given Vogt-Roberts's first film was Sundance smash *The Kings Of Summer*, we're expecting his first blockbuster to be every bit as gritty, grounded and gob-smacking. And yes, big. **JW**



GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL 2

OOGA CHAKA, OOGA CHAKA...

28
APR

“To me, this is the absolute centre of Vol 2,” says director James Gunn, “and one of the reasons I’ve been so excited about it.” What’s he talking about? Star-Lord’s dad, of course.

Merely hinted at in the original, the parentage of cocky space bandit Peter Quill (Chris Pratt) remained a mystery when the credits rolled on that money-spinner (\$783m in box office bullion), but thanks to Gunn we already know just who his pops is. And, in the brilliantly bonkers *Guardians* universe, it could only be “living planet” Ego (Kurt Russell, personally suggested for the role by Pratt).

“He is something ancient and unknown,” says Gunn. “And, as we will discover, being a cosmic being, alone for eons, is perhaps even more lonely than being the universe’s sole talking raccoon.” Speaking of which, Rocket Raccoon will be making a comeback, alongside a twig-sized version of Groot, plus Gamora (Zoe Saldana), Drax (Dave Bautista) and Nebula (Karen Gillan). Their new foe takes the form of Chris Sullivan’s Taserface, while a fresh ally arrives in Ayesha (Elizabeth Debicki), who’s “not a woman to be screwed with”, says Gunn. And with a whole new mix tape to look forward to, this is shaping up to be *the* feel-good sci-flick of 2017. **JW**

Baby Groot and some other guys.

GHOST IN THE SHELL

ROBOCOP MEETS *THE MATRIX* IN A BOLD NEW VISION...

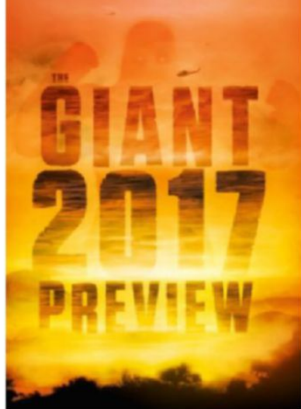
31
MAR

We’ve finally seen a trailer for the long-awaited live-action remake of anime classic *Ghost In The Shell*, and *Snow White And The Huntsman* director Rupert Sanders’s futuristic sci-fi looks magnificent. Inspired by Masamune Shirow’s revolutionary manga (which was originally

adapted for the screen in 1995), the plot follows cyborg officer the Major (Scarlett Johansson) as she attempts to bring down a conclave of evil hackers. “Rupert’s visual vocabulary is so unique and riveting,” says Johansson of the Brit director. “The thing that drew me to this project [was Rupert’s] vision for this world.” **JW**



Scarlett: better than Marshmen or Sea Devils.



"I will escape from this janitor's storeroom!"

WONDER WOMAN

FIGHTING FOR HER RIGHTS

2
JUN

Charismatic Gal Gadot survived the critical wreckage of *Batman V Superman*, hailed as one of the few bright spots in 2016's biggest blockbuster crash-and-burn. Now she straps on the sword and the shield in the first franchise movie to spotlight a female superhero since 1984's *Supergirl* (we'll ignore 2005's *Elektra* – everyone else did...). "It's total wish fulfilment," says Patty Jenkins, the first woman in Hollywood to direct a superheroic tentpole pic. "I, as a woman, want Wonder Woman to be as hot as hell, fight badass and look great at the same time." *Star Trek*'s Chris Pine is roguish main squeeze Steve Trevor while the Great War backdrop places the Amazon princess in a less clear-cut conflict than the fight against the Nazis of her comic strip birth. "We go back 100 years to when she's more naive," says Gadot. "She's this young idealist. She's pure. Very different to the experienced, super-confident, grown-up woman you've seen. [The film's] very interesting. It has moments of humour, but it's pretty dark." **NS**

THE MUMMY

LET'S GET THE BAND(AGES) BACK TOGETHER...

9
JUN

Hands up if the thought of Tom Cruise trading blows with a mummy has you coughing up sand in excitement. Yep, us too, particularly because the Cruisester hasn't made many official genre flicks in his career. He's returning to spooky happenings with a tomb-quaking bang in Universal's *The Mummy*, in which he finds himself battling an

ancient queen who wakes up on the wrong side of the sarcophagus and goes on the rampage.

So what makes it different to the 1999 reboot? Well, this time we're fully in present day, which will give the film an entirely different feel. "The minute it's modern day, the rules change," says writer-director Alex Kurtzman (*Star Trek*). "And yet, what's really exciting for me is how do you take this ancient creature and make an audience believe that they exist in modern day?" With Sofia Boutella donning the bandages, we're sure he'll find a way. **JW**



Hope the Vulture hasn't
done a poop on that car.



SPIDER-MAN: HOMECOMING

TEENAGE KICKS

7
JUL

It takes an industrial amount of charm to steal a movie like *Captain America: Civil War* – but that's exactly the heist that Tom Holland pulled off this summer, his adorably dorkish Peter Parker as crowd-pleasing as his star-struck, smart-mouthed Spider-Man.

Next year he earns his own solo movie, a film that returns the Webslinger to his authentic teenage roots. Yes, *Spider-Man: Homecoming* is a multi-purpose pun: not only does the reboot – the second in five years – cement the character's integration into the MCU (Marvel are producing, Sony are distributing), it also restores him to the American high school milieu of his comic book origins, the world of jocks, lockers, acne and angst that Stan Lee and Steve Ditko made as much Spidey's story as supervillains and web-fluid.

"You've seen the billionaire, the scientist, the soldier," says Holland, referencing his superpowered comrades in the Marvel universe. "Now it's time to see the kid."

It's not all on Holland's young shoulders, mind. The studio's stacking the film with upper-tier talent: Robert Downey Jr returns as Peter's mentor Tony Stark while Michael Keaton is winged nemesis the Vulture, a choice of villain that promises some spectacular aerial action among Manhattan's web-lashed skyscrapers. **NS**

WAR FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES

BRING OUT THE CHIMP

14
JUL

The Apes prequels keep swinging with the third in the revived franchise, set two years on from predecessor *Dawn*. That closed with storm clouds gathering, with human military forces on the way. It also saw ape leader

Caesar breaking central tenet "Ape will not kill ape"; how might killing rebel Koba have affected him? Expect to see the noble chimp "wrestling with his darker instincts".

This time Andy Serkis's increasingly loquacious ape has a new nemesis: a brutal colonel played by Woody Harrelson. Another key addition is Steve Zahn, as a new ape character.

War promises to be epic in more ways than one, casting Caesar as an almost Biblical figure – director Matt Reeves says, "He's going to become like a mythic ape figure, like Moses" – and sending him on a "mythic quest". We can also expect different settings, with events unfolding in snowy Sierra Nevada. Let's hope Serkis had long Johns under that mocap suit... **18**

KINGSMAN: THE GOLDEN CIRCLE

PREPARE FOR DOUBLE-O HEAVEN...

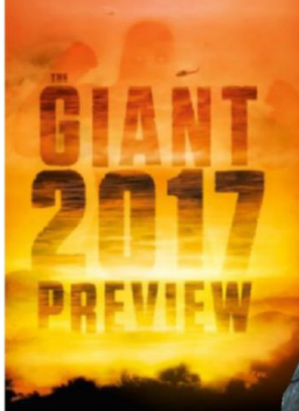
16
JUN

"Sequels are weird," says director Matthew Vaughn. Luckily his original *Kingsman* (2014's *The Secret Service*) was already pretty weird, pitting young chav Eggsy (Taron Egerton) against blade-legged assassins and Samuel L

Jackson's crazy tech genius. Admitting that writing this follow-up was "the hardest thing I've ever done", Vaughn's flick looks just as audacious as Eggsy, trainer Merlin (Mark Strong) and secret agent Roxy (Sophie Cookson) jet to the USA to work alongside US agent Ginger (Halle Berry). On snarly baddie duty is Julianne Moore, whose Poppy destroys Kingsman HQ. **JW**

REX (2)





Sat Navs won't help you now, Idris.

THE DARK TOWER

ALL RISE FOR THE KING...

28
JUL

Expanded universes are all the rage these days, and if any Stephen King project deserved an ambitious, multi-platform launch, it's this one. Drawing on cross-genre masterworks like *The Lord Of The Rings* and *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly*, *The Dark Tower* is King's eight-book magnum opus set in a land where a gunslinger attempts to track down the eponymous edifice, which stands at the universe's nexus. "What Stephen King does best is mixing the everyday with the fantastical," says director Nikolaj Arcel (best known for 2012 period drama *A Royal Affair*), whose film adaptation is a sequel to the final book in King's series and sees Idris Elba's frontiersman knight battling Matthew McConaughey's deceptive sorcerer. Then, in 2018, the story will continue in a TV series (also starring Elba and McConaughey) that adapts *The Dark Tower IV: Wizard And Glass*. This is going to be big... **JW**



ALIEN: COVENANT

GET READY FOR TROUBLE IN PARADISE...

19
MAY

Sigourney Weaver's waiting in the wings to give Ellen Ripley the swan song she deserves (in Neill Blomkamp's in-development *Alien 5*), but first we're getting this, Ridley Scott's sequel to *Prometheus*. There's no Ripley in sight (as far as we know), but there is Katherine Waterston (*Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them*) as Daniels, a crew member whose ship, *Covenant*, comes across a planetary paradise that hides a dark secret, and could be the home of the Engineers we met in *Prometheus*. Also there: Michael Fassbender's returning as android David (presumably with head reattached) and another synthetic named Walter, although it's unconfirmed just how Noomi Rapace's Elizabeth Shaw fits into the puzzle. With Scott planning this as the first in three films that will eventually link up to his original *Alien*, *Covenant* will share more than a little Alien DNA, featuring, he says, "egg, facehugger, chest-burster, then the big boy," the latter presumably a new breed of nightmare called a Neomorph. Escape pods at the ready... **JW**



Villeneuve, Scott, Ford and Gosling discuss the future of Los Angeles...

BLADE RUNNER 2049

YOU KNOW THE SCORE, PAL...

6
OCT

How do you follow-up a modern classic like *Blade Runner*? Well, if you're Ridley Scott, you recruit one of the hottest young actors working today and pair him with a director who's already been hailed as a visionary. Then you chuck Harrison Ford into the mix.

Set three decades on from the first film, *Blade Runner 2049* takes place in a Los Angeles besieged by freak weather. Here, we'll meet Ryan Gosling's as-yet-unnamed protagonist, who'll cross paths with Ford's Deckard. And if you're living in fear that the film was in the wrong hands, particularly when it comes to the mystery surrounding Deckard's Replicant origins, director Denis Villeneuve (*Arrival*, *Sicario*) has some words of reassurance. "I love mystery," he reveals. "I love shadows. I love doubts... We will take care of that mystery. I will take care of it." **JW**



Concept art showing that the weather hasn't got any better.

THOR: RAGNAROK

THAT'S A SIGHT FOR THOR EYES...

27
OCT

He was absent from *Captain America: Civil War*, only to pitch up in the post-credits scene of *Doctor Strange*, hunting his brother Loki (Tom Hiddleston), and Thor (Chris Hemsworth) is finally back with his third solo movie. "I wonder how Stan Lee feels about me doing a Thor film?" jokes director Taika Waititi, whose unique brand of comedy (see: *What We Do In The Shadows*) should gift Thor plenty of banter as he teams up with Hulk (Mark Ruffalo) to battle Cate Blanchett's Hela. And then there's the small matter of Loki, who claimed the throne in *Thor: The Dark World* by impersonating his dad, Odin. "The experience of being on Earth, I think, has changed Loki," says Hiddleston. "I don't want to reveal too much, but when you see the three characters who haven't shared the same space since the end of *Avengers [Assemble]*, there's a lot that happens to great dramatic and comedic effects." **JW**

GETTY (1)



Is Loki doing street magic now?



Available now for team-building office away day talks.

JUSTICE LEAGUE

STEP INTO THE LIGHT...

17
NOV

Get set for some serious course correction. After the joy vacuum of *Batman V Superman* and the mixed reception that met the sparky, messy *Suicide Squad*, it falls to this multi-icon mash-up to secure a viable future for DC's cinematic universe. We're promised a lighter, kinder take, upping the quip quota and easing back on the snarls and steroidal dick-waving. "Mistakenly in the past the studio has said, 'Oh, DC films are gritty and dark and that's what makes them different,'" says DC's Chief Creative Officer Geoff Johns, given a more hands-on role this time around. "That couldn't be more wrong." Director Zack Snyder is still to prove he can truly temper his love of bleak-hearted *Sturm und Drang* but we do know that the film will mine Jack Kirby's rich Fourth World mythos, pitting the Warner pantheon against *Game Of Thrones* star Ciarán Hinds as Steppenwolf, acolyte of cosmic Big Bad Darkseid. **NS**

STAR WARS: EPISODE VIII

WILL THE NEXT STAR WARS EPISODE BE A TRUE EIGHTH WONDER?

15
DEC

The Force Awakens had a very important job to do – prove to the world that Lucasfilm still knows how to make a *Star Wars* movie. With that particular mission accomplished – albeit to a tried-and-tested formula – expect the as-yet-untitled *Episode VIII* to let the shackles off and go somewhere new and original. After all, what's the point of hiring Rian Johnson, the brilliant indie darling writer/director behind *Brick* and *Looper*, if you just want him to make *The Empire Strikes Back: Redux*?

We reckon we're set to see a *Star Wars* movie unlike any we've seen before. *Looper*-style narrative gymnastics are probably out of the question, though after the precedent of Rey's vision in *Episode VII*, don't be surprised to see more flashbacks – they'll likely be key to a story that's poised in an intriguing place...

The New Republic's entire government was destroyed when Starkiller Base wiped out the Hosnian system, leaving a power vacuum that'll presumably have to be filled by Resistance leader Leia as the First Order do their best to Trump the Empire. Rey and Luke Skywalker will probably have plenty to talk about on that island on Ahch-To – not least the identity of her parents – and then there's the biggest question of all. Will Kylo Ren ever learn to control those tantrums? **RE**



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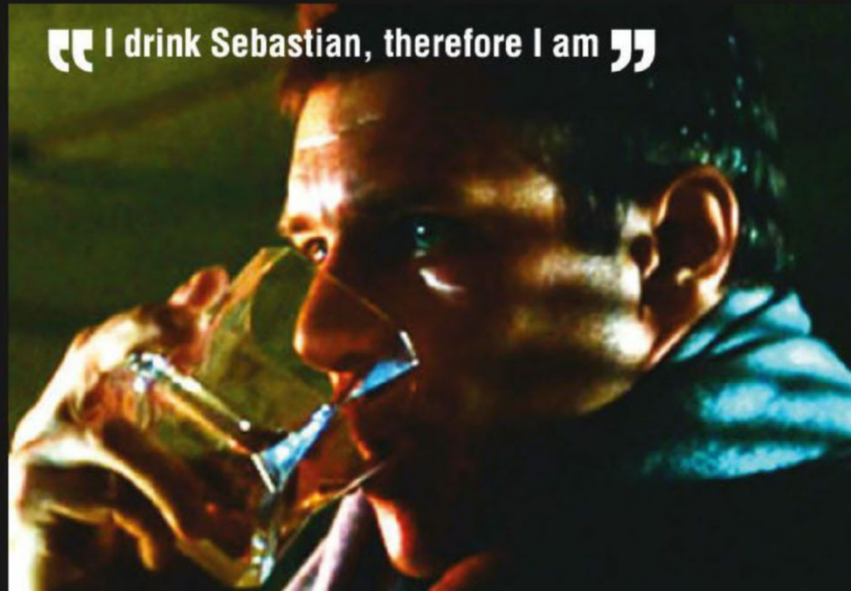
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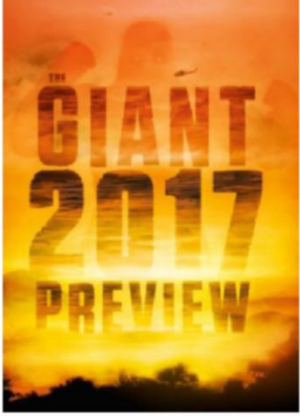
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“ I drink Sebastian, therefore I am ”





Tree's Company

Prepare for the most heart-wrenching fantasy movie of the year. Matt Glasby is on set as Patrick Ness's tale of death and dreaming comes to the screen...



Stories are wild creatures... when you let them loose, who knows what havoc they might wreak?" So proclaims the eponymous Monster (Liam Neeson), an ancient yew tree called forth by troubled schoolboy Conor O'Malley (Lewis MacDougall) in this dark fantasy directed by JA Bayona

(*The Orphanage*, *The Impossible*). He's not kidding... Based on the YA novel by Patrick Ness (showrunner of *Doctor Who* spin-off *Class*), this particular story is wreaking havoc across an entire studio backlot outside Barcelona. Amid the sinewy branches littering the set, the Monster is, quite literally, in pieces. In one corner sits its huge, trunk-like head with red bulbs instead of eyes; in another is a 6ft foot. If Bayona and co do their jobs, it won't just be the Monster who's in bits...

In case you hadn't guessed, *A Monster Calls* is an absolute heartbreaker. "It's a story about a kid dealing with the death of his mother [Felicity Jones]," Bayona tells *SFX* between takes. "When you touch the need to say goodbye, people normally don't go that far when they go to the movies. Especially in fantasy movies, which are so restricted because they cost a lot of money. Studios don't want to disturb the audiences, they want them only to have fun, and I thought they could have a lot of fun watching this film but they can also learn what life is about. I don't want to sound pretentious, but I wanted to make audiences think about it, then send them back home with the film still growing in their minds."

Based on an outline left behind by writer Siobhan Dowd, who died of cancer in 2007, *Monster* was completed by Ness, with some



Jim Kay concept art, from *A Monster Calls Special Collector's Edition*, Walker Books.

reservations. "I was going to say no because of the pressure to write something good," he tells us. "Also, I didn't want to write a book that she would have written, I wanted to write a book that she would have loved." Illustrated by Jim McKay, the finished novel received a rapturous reception, and Ness wrote a spec script which attracted Bayona, "a really strong fit" according to the author. "I respect the seriousness with which he is willing to take a young person's POV, which not all movies featuring kids do, and his implicit willingness to let genres bleed, which I believe in very strongly," says Ness. Neeson is more succinct: "I was gripped from page one."

CHILD'S PLAY

On a cemetery set recalling something out of Godric's Hollow in *Harry Potter*, a pivotal scene is in process. Dressed like a typical British schoolboy, MacDougall sprints through toppling gravestones as the earth shudders and

gives way beneath him. Just as he reaches the edge, stunt wires save him. "No accidents for now," says Bayona watching anxiously. "I cross my fingers!" Though levity is in short supply in the film, Bayona did allow himself some fan-boy moments directing Sigourney Weaver, who plays Conor's fearsome grandmother, asking, "Why was she carrying a gorilla when she stepped out of the helicopter in *Working Girl*?" This, we learn, was a reference to King Kong, the ultimate misunderstood monster, who cameos here in a cine-film Conor watches with his mum. "There are probably only 60 kids in the world who watched old cine movies when they were young, but they all grew up to be filmmakers," says Ness, "so that's why King Kong is in there, god love him..." Weaver, for her part, was glad to be working with Liam Neeson, the "best looking tree in the world..." and looks forward to Bayona's next project, *Jurassic World 2*: "I expect to be a) a dinosaur, or b) a bystander horribly eaten by a dinosaur."

GOT WOOD?

Our favourite sentient trees



Apple Trees

The Wizard Of Oz (1939)

Scrumptious beware, anyone coveting these chaps' forbidden - but oh-so-tempting - fruit can expect a dressing down as sour as off-cider. Talk about whingeing pomes.



Tabanga

From Hell it Came (1957)

A wrongfully executed South Seas prince is reincarnated as a scowling killer stump bent on revenge, thanks to some good old radioactive fallout in this brilliantly creaky B-movie.



The Whomping Willow

Harry Potter series (2001 onwards)

The thwack of something on willow has different connotations at Hogwarts: this secret-passage-guarding-shrub has just chinned a flying car/broomstick/werewolf.



Treebeard

The Two Towers (2002)

The anthropomorphic arbor by which all others must be measured, this irascible Ent - Middle-earth's "shepherds of trees" - is one of the world's oldest, and slowest, inhabitants. Timber!



Groot

Guardians Of The Galaxy (2014)

Voiced by Vin Diesel in his least plank-like performance, Marvel's tri-syllabic tree packs a world of meaning into the words: "I am Groot." And, eventually, "We are Groot."

IMAGE © 2016 A MONSTER CALLS, AIE TELECINCO CINEMA, SAU, APACHES ENTERTAINMENT, SL AND PELICULAS LA TRINI SLUW



That kid's definitely won the science fair.



The search for the missing contact lens continued.

For his current *Monster*, brought to life by performance capture and CGI, “We did thousands of designs,” says Bayona, “but the more we went into fantasy the less interesting it was. I wanted to keep it very ambiguous, more like an image where you can project your needs, your fears, more than something with lots of horns and tentacles.” Just don’t mention the E word. “I went to a friend and showed him the final design and he said it looks like an Ent!” Bayona laughs. “I said, ‘What the fuck is an Ent?’ and then I googled ‘monster tree shape’ and I saw there were lots of characters that look like Ents. I thought, I don’t want my tree to look like a tree, it needs to look like a man, so we threw away those designs, started from scratch and ultimately came up with something much more similar to what’s in the book...”

Producer Belén Atienza, who’s had a hand in just about every Spanish-language fantasy since 2006’s *Pan’s Labyrinth*, recalls: “When we went to shoot the performance capture it was the first time for us, and the first time for Liam, so the first few days were like, ‘Er, it’s an empty space with a [performance-cap] suit...’ But little by little you forget about the suit and you start seeing Liam as a tree, a monster, and that was a very beautiful process. The end result is a combination of real effects and CGI. We really like to work with practical effects. We did that in *The Impossible*, we had real water, and it totally changed the tone. The first idea was to do CG water; people said you can’t do a tsunami with real water, but the process of working out how to do it ‘for real’ was much more interesting; which is the case here too. We think it’s in the combination of practical and digital FX, so you cannot say what’s digital and what’s real. If we get there that’s great.”

Another special effect comes courtesy of Neeson’s rich Ulster rumble. “I wanted to use my own accent,” he explains. “Because it’s old in itself, it’s Celtic, and I think in the audience’s imagination Irish accents give a kind of weight and an ancient quality.” Thanks to a new pre-viz system called SolidTrack, we’re given

glimpses of the Monster combined with live-action footage. Colossal and crepuscular, with eyes of flame and scratchy pen-stroke detailing, he more than does justice to McKay’s magnificent drawings. In fact, he could photosynthesise an Ent for breakfast...

PAYING IT FORWARD

If the film deals with legacies – the things that we gift those we leave behind – it also, of course, represents one. “This was something that Bayona explained to Patrick the first time we all met,” says Atienza. “Siobhan Dowd started this, you very respectfully took her work and made something beautiful, now we’re asking for permission to do the same. It’s a lovely journey: this woman leaving something behind, Patrick taking it on, and hopefully us doing something at the same level.” When asked for comparison points she namechecks huge, haunting fantasies such as *The Iron Giant* and *ET*. They’re pretty sizeable boots to fill, but Bayona and Atienza are no strangers to soliciting visceral responses from their audiences.

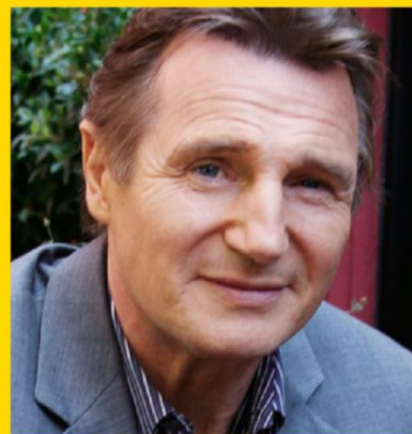
“We had a big problem with *The Impossible*, because people started to faint,” says Bayona, citing incidents at film festivals where ambulances were sent for. “Belen called me and said, ‘We’ve had five screenings and five people fainted. Next Friday, the film opens in Spain in 600 screens. Oh my god!’”

In the case of *A Monster Calls*, however, it’ll be floods of tears rather than actual floods. “Ultimately it has to be emotional because man understands things through emotion,” says Bayona. “It’s going to remove the audience from their comfort zones and send them back home thinking about their own lives. That’s what I like about movies, making a transformative experience, so you’re not the same after watching it.” And with that, he heads back to his monitors, to his wild creature of a story, and prepares to wreak havoc once more. ●

A Monster Calls opens on 1 January.

“WE ALL NEED STORIES”

Liam Neeson: a monster talks



What attracted you to the role?

They had me from day one. I remember reading several years ago that Patrick was given this story by Siobhan Dowd who passed away from cancer, you know. Patrick’s an amazing writer, and I admired him all the more for working on an original idea from another writer that she wasn’t able to complete.

Why does the Monster appear to Conor?

Well, the monster’s there to try and teach life lessons, to imbue the idea that nothing is ever as it seems. And, of course, the overriding element in this story is that this boy’s going to have to cope with the death of the greatest love he’ll ever have in his life, which is his mother. It certainly isn’t just a children’s film. There’s life lessons in it for all of us...

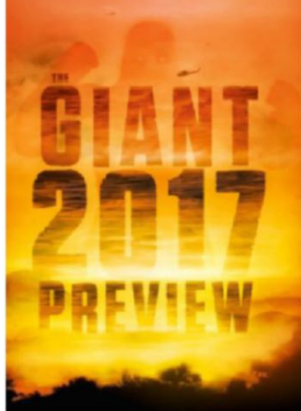
Can stories heal?

We all need, and love, stories, you know. That’s why fairytales were written – I’m thinking in particular of Oscar Wilde’s beautiful children’s stories, that have profound lessons built into them – and they’re usually about how complex life actually is. I mean, the stories that the Monster tells the boy, they never turn out the way you think they should turn out, you know, because life isn’t like that.

It’s quite a legacy to be carrying...

It is. I never met Siobhan and I’ve only met Patrick a couple of times, but I hope they’re impressed with what [director JA] Bayona has done.

REX (1)

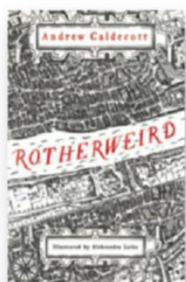


Turn up the volumes. Jonathan Wright looks ahead to some of next year's literary highlights

THE UNMISSABLE BOOKS PREVIEW

ROTHERWEIRD

ANDREW CALDECOTT
ETA JUNE • JO FLETCHER BOOKS



The title refers to a town that's cut off from the rest of England, a place with no history but plenty of secrets, which two outsiders will try to discover. The publisher's pitch here – “Jonathan Strange meets *League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen* with a sprinkling of *Gormenghast*” – makes us curious to know more. Andrew Caldecott, incidentally, is a senior barrister and occasional playwright.

THE MASSACRE OF MANKIND

STEPHEN BAXTER
ETA JANUARY • GOLLANCZ



Authorised by the HG Wells Estate, Stephen Baxter's sequel to *The War Of The Worlds* is set 14 years after England almost fell to “intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic”. A novel that's both an audacious exercise in alternate history, where humanity has made technological leaps thanks to filching abandoned alien machinery, and a hugely exciting adventure.

THE WHITE ROAD

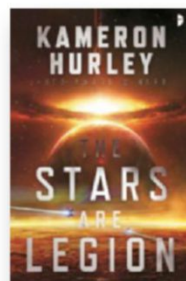
SARAH LOTZ
ETA MAY • HODDER & STOUGHTON



When thrill-seeker Simon Newman, along with a strange man he met online, sneaks onto private land to explore a dangerous cave and nearly loses his life, video of his near-death experience goes viral. Cool. How can he top this? Head for Mount Everest. South African émigré Sarah Lotz – previously responsible for the chilly likes of *The Three* and *Day Four* – conjures up a horror-cum-thriller to cement her growing reputation.

THE STARS ARE LEGION

KAMERON HURLEY
ETA FEBRUARY • ANGRY ROBOT

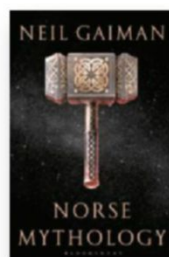


Having established herself as both storyteller and, with *The Geek Feminist Revolution*, essayist, Kameron Hurley turns her attention to space opera. If the set-up here – “decaying world ships” known collectively as the Legion traversing “seams between the stars” and a war that's lasted generations – doesn't excite you, *SFX* probably isn't for you. “Badass,” reckons John Scalzi, approvingly.

NORSE MYTHOLOGY

NEIL GAIMAN

ETA FEBRUARY • BLOOMSBURY



Having so often woven elements of our oldest tales into contemporary fantasies, Neil Gaiman goes back to the wellspring and offers a retelling of classic tales from Norse mythology. A backwards step? Not at all, because Gaiman brings Thor, Loki et al vividly alive for a new generation. For maximum effect, lay in a log fire and read on a frosty night.

NEW YORK 2140

KIM STANLEY ROBINSON

ETA MARCH • ORBIT

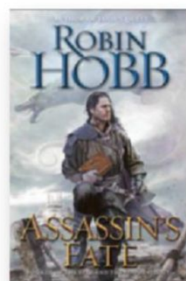


Kim Stanley Robinson reimagines the Big Apple of the 22nd century as a kind of futuristic Venice, still bustling and noisy, still vibrantly alive. The book shows us events from the perspective of the residents of one skyscraper, in a similar manner to Ballard's *High-Rise*. Expect a deeply humane take on how we'll have to adapt to cope with the effects of climate change.

ASSASSIN'S FATE

ROBIN HOBB

ETA MAY • VOYAGER



It's easy to get blasé about some of our best-known writers, to undervalue consistency. Let's not do that. Robin Hobb has been writing brilliantly for years now. *Assassin's Fate*, the final volume in her *Fitz And The Fool* trilogy, telling of Prince FitzChivalry Farseer on a mission of revenge following the abduction of his daughter, Bee, promises to be compelling spring reading.

GILDED CAGE

VIC JAMES

ETA JANUARY • PAN BOOKS



As producer of the Jacques Peretti-fronted BBC Two series *The Super-Rich And Us*, Vic James spent much time pondering folks with money and power. What if, she thought, this class was also set apart because they had magical powers? James's dystopian debut, the first part in her *Dark Arts* trilogy, addresses issues of inequality that seem all too pertinent.

THE BEAR AND THE NIGHTINGALE

KATHERINE ARDEN

ETA JANUARY • DELRAY

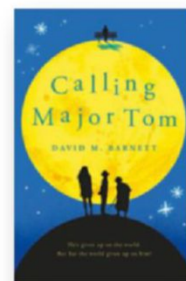


Blending magical realism and Russian fairytales, Texas-born Katherine Arden's debut has been attracting rave reviews on the GoodReads website. It's set in a village on the edge of the wilderness of northern Russia. Here, a stranger offers a father the gift of a precious jewel on a delicate chain for his newborn daughter, Vasya. But gifts can impose dangerous obligations...

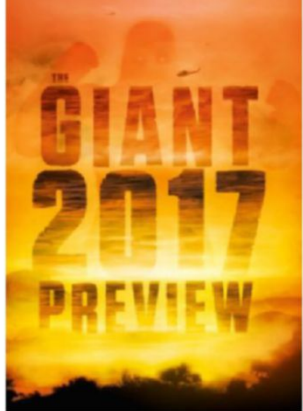
CALLING MAJOR TOM

DAVID M BARNETT

ETA JUNE • TRAPEZE



When the shock of David Bowie's death collided in his imagination with news of British starman Tim Peake's space walk, David M Barnett came up with a plot for a new novel contrasting an astronaut's grumpy orbital isolation with messy family life back on Earth. Not quite SF perhaps, but a book that promises to fascinatingly float between genres in a most peculiar way.



THE UNMISSABLE COMICS PREVIEW

From vampires to mutants, Stephen Jewell surveys some of 2017's hottest comics

Batwoman

DC's decree that Kate Kane couldn't marry her girlfriend marred her last series but the future is looking brighter for Batwoman. Known for championing gay characters in series like *DC Bombshells*, Marguerite Bennett is now taking charge of Gotham's inaugural superheroine. Starting out with a *Detective Comics* two-parter, which Bennett will co-write with James Tynion IV, *Batwoman Rebirth* is scheduled for February before the Steve Epting-drawn monthly series drops in March. Maybe expect wedding bells soon?

More demure but no less bloody.



Vampirella

Having first appeared in 1969, Vampirella will be experiencing her most promising reboot to date in February thanks to Paul Cornell and Jimmy Broxton, who previously collaborated on DC's *Knight & Squire*. Moving away from the often-scantily clad vampire's notorious cheesecake image, Cornell is determined to make the original Bad Girl appeal to more modern sensibilities. The first issue is being sold at a bargain 25 cents.

Monsters Unleashed

After *Civil War 2*'s bitter in-fighting, January crossover *Monsters Unleashed* promises nothing but pure fun, as Earth's Greatest Heroes and other Marvel stalwarts duke it out with some really big, big bads including Fin Fang Foom, Devil Dinosaur and Monstrom. Written by Cullen Bunn, the bi-weekly series is illustrated by a horde of artists including Steve McNiven and Leinil Yu.

Bet you're spooked already, huh?



Penny Dreadful

Anyone disappointed by TV's *Penny Dreadful* coming to an end will receive some solace from the news that Ethan Chandler and co will live on next spring in a new Titan Comics series. Written by *Penny Dreadful* scriptwriters Chris King, Krysty Wilson-Cairns and Andrew Hinderaker and illustrated by Louie De Marinis, it begins with the werewolf still mourning the loss of his beloved Vanessa, before confronting some sinister creatures of the night.

ResurreXion

With the mutants and the Inhumans battling it out right now in *IvX*, Marvel's X-line is set for a dramatic relaunch next spring. With their ranks decimated by the Terrigen Mists, ResurreXion will see a host of new titles, including solo books for Jean Grey, Cable, Weapon X and Iceman, and new team books *X-Men Blue* and *X-Men Gold*, which hark back to the Merry Mutants' '90s line-ups.



The Wild Storm

After laying waste to the superhero genre with *The Authority* in the late 1990s, Warren Ellis is reviving DC's WildStorm imprint in February. Playing a similar role to Gerard Way at Young Animal, Ellis is curating the whole line, supervising upcoming series like *Zealot*, *Michael Cray (aka Deathblow)* and *WildCATS* in addition to joining artist Jon Davis Hunt on flagship title *The Wild Storm*, which propels Spirit of the 20th Century Jenny Sparks headlong into the new millennium.

Star Trek Vs Aliens

Coinciding with *The Next Generation*'s 30th anniversary in April, Captain Picard and crew will face their most grisly adversary yet in *Star Trek: The Next Generation/Aliens*. Co-published by IDW and Dark Horse, *Acceptable Losses* is written by Scott and David Tipton, and drawn by JK Woodward, who previously joined forces on IDW's adaptation of Harlan Ellison's *City On The Edge Of Forever*. April's six-issue miniseries will also feature the Borg and the Romulans.



Assassin's Creed

Titan's new *Assassin's Creed* series should appeal equally to those familiar with the games or just the movie. Written by Dan Watters (*Limbo*) and Alex Paknadel (*Arcadia*) and drawn by *Assassin's Creed* videogame storyboarder Jose Holder, its storyline centres around the Phoenix Project, a Templar plot to discover the sinister secrets found in the DNA of some early ancestors.



He ate all the pies.

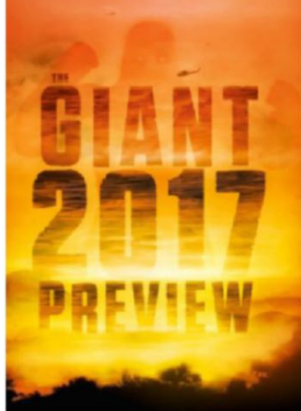
American Gods

American Gods isn't only heading for the small screen in 2017. Starting in March, Dark Horse is adapting Neil Gaiman's 2001 novel for comics. Renowned for his ornate art on *Sandman: The Dream Hunters*, and *The Graveyard Book* and *Coraline* graphic novels, P Craig Russell is handling scripting duties for artist Scott Hampton. Walt Simonson, Mark Buckingham, Colleen Doran and Russell himself will also contribute interiors, while Glenn Fabry, David Mack and Dave McKean provide covers.



Darkness Visible

Known respectively for *The Girl With All The Gifts* and bringing Dirk Gently back to TV, Mike Carey and Arvind Ethan David are joining forces at IDW in February on new horror series, *Darkness Visible*. Illustrated by Brendan Cahill, the five-parter is set in a world where demons live alongside humans, and centres around a police detective who enters into a satanic pact in order to save the soul of his daughter.



THE UNMISSABLE TV PREVIEW

Whether you're streaming, bingeing or just plain goggling at the box, here are 10 slices of appointment telly for next year

WORDS: STEPHEN KELLY, TARA BENNETT, RICHARD EDWARDS



You won't miss the superhero lycra in *Powerless*, honest.

POWERLESS ORDINARY MORTALS

ETA
JAN

UK TBC
US NBC

Not everyone can be the superhero of the story. In fact, some need to be the insurance adjusters cleaning up their messes, which is what *Powerless*, the new comedy from creator Ben Queen, will explore in 2017.

Queen, who is no longer the showrunner but still an EP on the series, says the concept was birthed from a simple question last year. "I had a general meeting with DC Comics and I said, 'Have you guys thought about a work place comedy?' They said no and it was as easy as that," he laughs.

Queen says he developed *Powerless* to counter the current spate of serious-minded cape shows. In fact Emily, the show's heroine played by Vanessa Hudgens, is just a normal gal undertaking her own fight against her less-than-kindly bosses. "The idea is what would it be like to live in that world, and be a normal person without powers?" **TB**

LEGION IMAGINATION RUN WILD

ETA
FEB

UK FOX
US FX

Scrub *Apocalypse* from your mind and get excited: X-Men's first TV show is here, and it probably doesn't suck. Created by *Fargo*'s Noah Hawley, *Legion* is a standalone take on eponymous comic character David Haller (Dan Stevens), a powerful mutant whose powers are intertwined with a multiple personality disorder. Oh yeah, and he's also Charles Xavier's son.

Judging from footage seen so far, it's surreal, striking and unlike any other superhero show you've seen before. This, mostly, is to do with the central premise: that anything in *Legion*'s world, and all the large, vibrant characters in it, could be a figment of David's imagination. Think David Lynch. Think *Alice In Wonderland*. Think of a cast including Aubrey Plaza and Jemaine Clement. Think off-beat song-and-dance sequences and rooms exploding.

If *Legion* isn't one of the best sci-fi shows of 2017, then it'll certainly be one of the weirdest. **SK**



Yep, that's gonna smart.

IRON FIST

FIST AMONG EQUALS

ETA
MARUK Netflix
US Netflix**Daredevil, Jessica Jones, Luke Cage... Iron**

Fist has a whole load of tough acts to follow. But he's more than just the last Defender.

He's Danny Rand (Finn Jones), a martial arts master with the ability to punch stuff really hard – all thanks to a mystical force known as the Iron Fist.

The series has been described as Marvel TV's "foray into martial arts films", with each episode named after a kung-fu movie. It's also said to be funnier than its sister shows, with showrunner Scott Buck having described Rand as "a much lighter character. He's someone that has optimism and hope, and despite whatever the odds are, everything is always going to work out".

The series will pick up with Rand – missing for 15 years – returning to New York to reclaim his family business and face down new, unexpected threats; threats that will involve, of course, punching people. **SK**

STAR TREK DISCOVERY

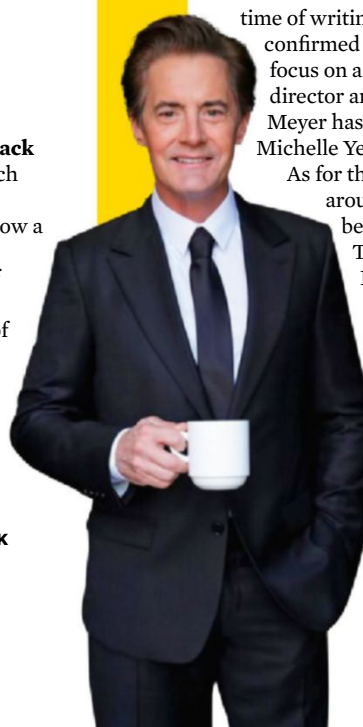
BOLDLY GOING BACK TO THE BOX

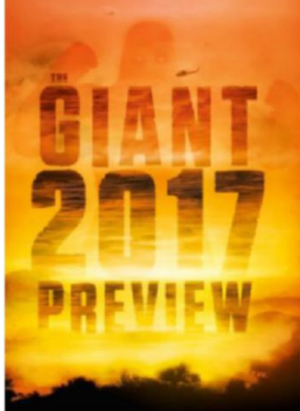
ETA
MAYUK Netflix
US CBS All Access**The saddest thing about Star Trek's 50th**anniversary earlier this year was that unlike, say, *Doctor Who*, there was no show on TV that could properly celebrate it. Still, there is the forthcoming *Star Trek: Discovery*, a prequel series set 10 years before Kirk, Spock and the events of the original '60s show.Created by *Hannibal*'s Bryan Fuller (who has now stepped back from showrunning duties), it will follow the crew of the USS *Discovery* as they explore new worlds. At time of writing, specifics are limited, but Fuller has confirmed that rather than a starship captain, it will focus on a female first officer. *The Wrath Of Khan* director and *Discovery* consulting producer Nicholas Meyer has also said that *Tomorrow Never Dies*' Michelle Yeoh is in the cast.As for the plot, *Discovery*'s arc is said to revolve around "an event in *Star Trek* history that's been talked about but never been explored". This could mean a few things, of course, but Fuller has said that *The Original Series* episode "Balance Of Terror" – centred around a stand-off between the Enterprise and the Romulans which turns into a game of cat-and-mouse – is a touchstone for the show's story. Despite taking place a century beforehand, could the Earth-Romulan War have something to do with *Discovery*'s plot? Well, there is always time travel... **SK**

Just think of all the lovely crew in there!

TWIN PEAKS

TO THE POWER OF PIE

ETA
SPRINGUK Sky Atlantic
US Showtime**Just as Laura Palmer promised, *Twin Peaks* is back** – with original creators Mark Frost and David Lynch reuniting for yet another damn fine cup of coffee.Picking up after 25 years, the new series will follow a fresh, as-yet unnamed FBI agent: a woman tasked with investigating a mysterious dossier about the strange town of Twin Peaks. Most of the old faces are back, including Kyle MacLachlan's Dale Cooper, apparently missing since the events of *Fire Walk With Me*. There will be new names too – such as Laura Dern, Naomi Watts and Michael Cera.It's uncertain how many episodes the revival will run for, but it's sure to be more than the originally announced nine, a number that seemed to cause disagreement between Lynch and Showtime – the smart money's currently on 18. Frost has said that, "It's our hope that these episodes will give the fans everything they felt they hadn't gotten the last time we left off." **SK**



AMERICAN GODS

UNITED ALTERED STATES

ETA
TBC

UK Amazon
US Starz

Neil Gaiman originally wrote *American Gods* in the late '90s, envisioning a world in which the things we worship manifest themselves as gods – meaning that the gods of old (Thor, Odin and so on) are dying out in

favour of the new (the internet, celebrity).

The long-awaited TV version, adapted by *Hannibal*'s Bryan Fuller and *Heroes*' Michael Green, will update the book for a post-9/11 age – one of Twitter, selfies and Trump. It will follow its two main characters – grieving ex-con Shadow, played by newcomer Ricky Whittle, and his enigmatic employer Mr Wednesday, played by grizzled veteran Ian McShane – into the heart of the American Nightmare, exploring faith, mythology and men who get eaten alive by vaginas.

Judging from the footage seen so far, it looks like it's going to be one of the weirdest, wildest and most interesting things on TV. **SK**

"Please god, stop making everything around me red."

STRANGER THINGS

THIS GOES TO ELEVEN

ETA
TBC

UK Netflix
US Netflix

Of course *Stranger Things* was a huge, internet-breaking success. How could it not be? It played upon our fetishisation of the past. It had Spielbergian suburbia. It had a cool-ass John Carpenter-esque soundtrack. It had kids ripped straight out of *The Goonies* and *ET*. But does

it have anywhere to go from here, or is series two just an excuse to exhume Barb?

According to creators the Duffer Brothers, it will pick up a year after the events of the first, and explore the wider mythology behind the Upside Down. It will also introduce several new characters, including mysterious young woman Roman (Linnea Berthelsen); the kindhearted former nerd Bob (Sean Astin, aka Sam from *The Lord Of The Rings*); and Dr Owens (*Aliens*' Paul Reiser), a high-ranking member of the Department of Energy, charged with cleaning up the events of series one. And, yep, it will also see the return of Millie Bobby Brown as Eleven. Duh. **SK**



New cast members
Sadie Sink and Dacre
Montgomery.



Drinking excessively
is bad for you.



GAME OF THRONES

WINTER FUEL

ETA
SUMMER

UK Sky Atlantic
US HBO

Daenerys Targaryen sails for King's Landing, her dragons roaring overhead. Cersei Lannister, dressed like a tyrannical Nazi queen, reigns on the Iron Throne. Jon Snow, having just reclaimed Winterfell, is declared King in the North. Finally, after six series, the board is set, and the real Game of Thrones begins. But how long will it last? For Winter is here – and with it comes bigger concerns than whoever sits on a fancy chair.

Yet Winter also means less episodes, with this penultimate series being only seven episodes long as opposed to the usual 10; a change, according to showrunners DB Weiss and David Benioff, to do with the show's production schedule needing to accommodate mono-weather. Beyond that, what's known? Well, unless you've been paying attention to the show's apparently catastrophic plot leaks, then not much. But we can't see the series involving anything less than weapons of mass dragon destruction... **SK**

MIDNIGHT, TEXAS

WELCOME TO FRIGHTVILLE, USA

ETA
TBC

UK TBC
US NBC

Midnight, Texas is based on the books of Charlaune Harris, best known as the author behind hit HBO series *True Blood*. It follows the inhabitants of Midnight, a remote town that acts as a safe haven for the fantastical – including vampires, witches and its lead psychic Manfred (François Arnaud), who can communicate with the dead. Airing on NBC in America, it's been co-created by *Fringe* writer Monica Owusu-Breen and Mark Hentemann, ex-writer on *Family Guy*; both of whom look to have written a fun, pulpy fantasy – like a cross between *Twin Peaks* and *True Blood*. **SK**

Still the Jupiter Mining
Corporation's finest.



RED DWARF XII

A STARBUG'S LIFE

ETA
LATE 2017

UK Dave
US TBC

Red Dwarf's 1999-2009 wilderness years didn't go on quite as long as *Doctor Who's*, but the show's comeback has been similarly successful. Having rediscovered their mojo with 2012's excellent Series X, the boys from the Dwarf were back on form with this autumn's similarly fun Series XI, its mix of gags and some very clever sci-fi feeling like a welcome throwback to the glory days of the early '90s.

The best news is we have to wait less than a year for the next half dozen episodes, thanks to host channel Dave's foresight in filming two series back-to-back either side of Christmas 2015. "There were no weekends off ever – ever, ever!" writer/co-creator Doug Naylor says of his gargantuan task of assembling a dozen *Red Dwarf* stories on the bounce.

As for plot details, everyone's remaining typically tight-lipped – though we do know that one episode will see Rimmer, Lister and the Cat being turned into mechanoids. "I feel sorry for them. I wouldn't wish it on anyone," laughs Robert "Kryten" Llewellyn, a man with plenty of experience of donning the rubber mask. "But it's only one episode!" **RE**

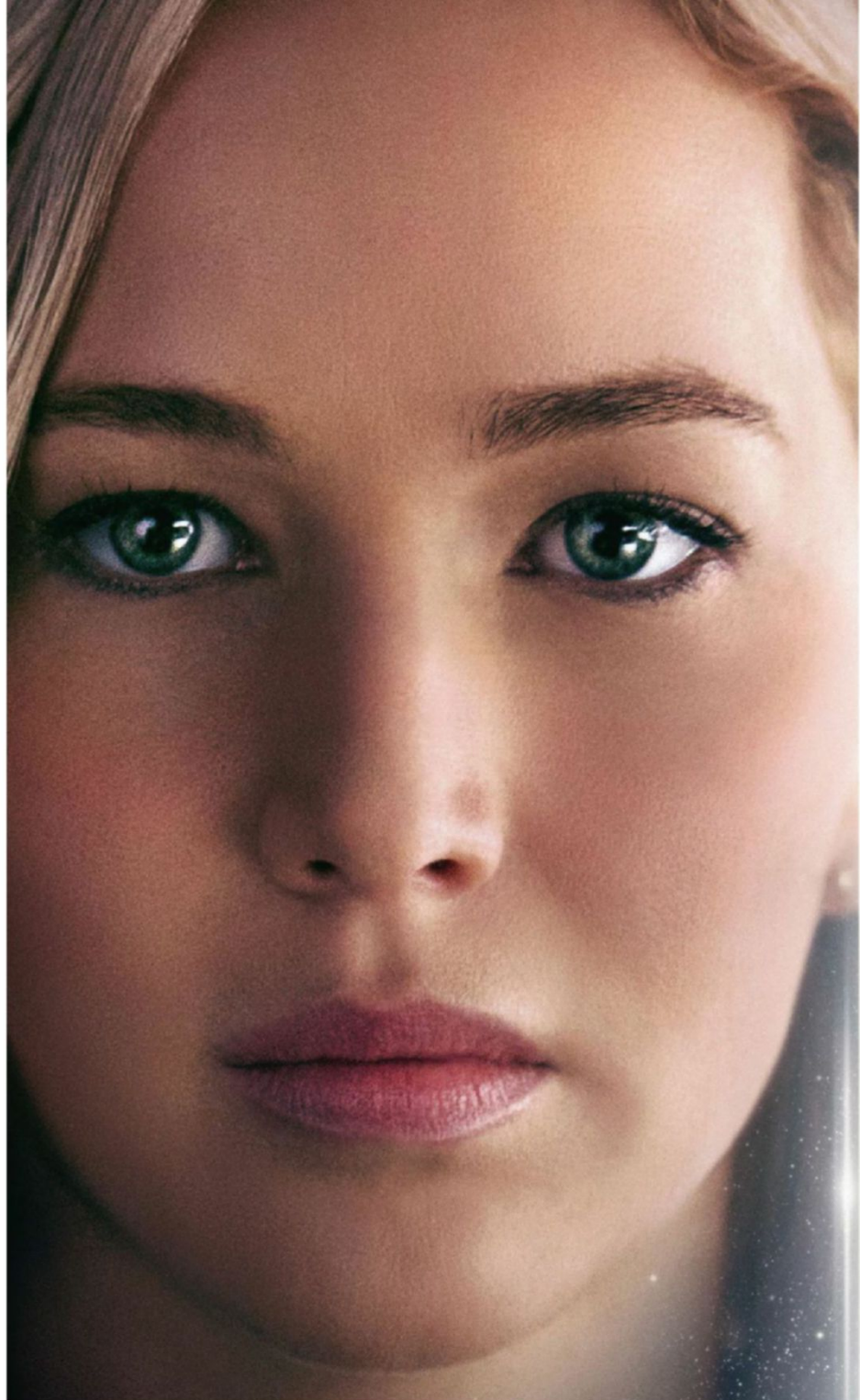
When Jon Spaihts wrote the script for *Passengers* a decade ago, he envisioned a new kind of science fiction. "I wanted a story filled with wonder and optimism about the future, and, most of all, I wanted it to be richly imbued with humanity," Spaihts, one of the writers of *Doctor Strange*, tells *SFX*. "I was tired of dystopias and war stories. Once I hit upon the idea of waking up too soon on a colony ship, the core of the story unfolded rapidly with a kind of necessity, as if there was only one way it could play out."

Directed by *The Imitation Game*'s Morten Tyldum, *Passengers* is set entirely on the Starship Avalon, a luxury interstellar spaceship transporting more than 5,000 passengers on a 120-year voyage to a distant colony planet. When a malfunction occurs in two of the sleep chambers, Aurora and Jim (Jennifer Lawrence and Chris Pratt) find themselves stranded and alone, 90 years from their destination. "Jim and Aurora are, by mysterious mishap, awakened decades too soon on a ship full of hibernating passengers and crew," Spaihts reveals. "There's no way to get back on track – to go back to sleep in their pods and resume their journeys. They're stuck on this grand starship by themselves. It's impossible to separate their relationship from their strange fate."

JUST THE TWO OF US

Although the premise of two people trapped alone on a starship might sound contained or limiting, *Passengers* takes place on an epic scale. "The ship is the size of a small city and surrounded by glittering cosmic vistas," explains Spaihts. "There's a lot of places to go and a lot for the eye to take in. As the story progresses, our heroes find ways to unlock new areas within the ship, so our experience of the Avalon is constantly changing and growing."

It was the emotional journey and the love story within *Passengers* that attracted Tyldum



THE BIG SLEEP

A boy, a girl, a starship... David Grove hitchhikes a ride aboard epic deep-space romance **PASSENGERS**

to the project. "I've always wanted to make a big science fiction film, but it was the human elements in the story that made me want to direct this film," he says. "Although the film takes place on an epic scale, with massive sets and lots of effects, it's also an intimate movie. The challenge, as director, was to maintain the focus on character development while dealing with the technical complexities of a big movie. This is a love story. There is emotion, humour and suspense. This film asks questions about what we need to be happy in our lives, about what's really important."

THE HUMAN FACTOR

A self-described science geek, who is well-versed in the fundamentals of space exploration, Spaihts wanted the science in *Passengers* to be grounded in real life. "Few travellers today know how their cruise ship navigates or what keeps their jet plane aloft," he says. "They just go along for the ride. That sets *Passengers* apart from a lot of science fiction films. It's set in the future, but the future isn't a star of the film. I made deliberate choices to make the world culturally recognisable and relatable, so that it didn't become a distraction from the human story unfolding front and centre."

After waiting a decade for his story to be brought to life, Spaihts tells *SFX* he's thrilled by what Tyldum and the cast and crew have achieved. "Chris and Jennifer beautifully capture their characters, and their chemistry onscreen is everything you could hope for," he says. "Both of them made the characters their own, finding moments of humour and flashes of spirit that deepened the story on the page. I was incredibly fortunate to work with Morten, because he got what the script was about: the emotional journey, the ethical dilemmas, and the love story. He brought those things to life." ●

Passengers opens on 21 December.

“Although the film takes place on an epic scale, it's also an intimate movie”

Chris Pratt and Jennifer Lawrence play reluctant travel companions.





Altered States

THE CAST OF AMAZON'S **THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE** TELL RICHARD EDWARDS WHAT'S IN STORE FOR THE "NAZIS WON THE WAR" DRAMA IN ITS SECOND SEASON

What if Hitler had won World War II? It's the ultimate thought experiment, a scenario that has fuelled numerous alternate reality tales. The acclaimed first season of Amazon's adaptation of Philip K Dick's classic novel created a frighteningly plausible vision of an America ruled by the Nazis in the West, and the Japanese in the East. We spoke to the cast and producers to get the intel on where their characters are headed and the departure of showrunner (and *X-Files* veteran) Frank Spotnitz, and to find out if we'll finally see that eponymous Man in the High Castle, the guy who's sending out film reels depicting an alternate reality where the Nazis *didn't* win after all...

ON THE CHARACTERS

LUKE KLEINTANK (Joe Blake) We pick up right where we left off, on the boat with Joe. He goes to Germany and he goes to Berlin. He gets to see that world which is so grand compared to New York City. We go deeper into who Joe is as an individual and why he was doing what he was doing; why he was hired to do what he was hired to do, who he is and where he comes from. He doesn't know any of this. It's all news to him, so it's a reveal to him and a reveal to the audience at the same time – which is really kind of nice, because you get to go with him on his journey.

BELLA HEATHCOTE (Nicole Dormer) Nicole is a documentary filmmaker [in Germany]. She's kind of like the embodiment of the perfect Aryan woman. She's really privileged, she seems to like to party a lot, and basically her wealth and privilege just affords her some level of protection and some level of independence which, in this situation in this Nazi world, she wouldn't have had otherwise. There's a whole generation of kids in this alternate reality where the Nazis won the war, where they're the next generation. They're not the perpetrators of the crimes, and they're not necessarily believers in any of the ideologies. They're just young people who are in this circumstance. I find that really interesting, watching how they all deal with it or manage it or try to avoid it. Also, she's a flirt – and she likes the look of Joe Blake.

RUPERT EVANS (Frank Frink) I think it's fair to say that after the events of season one, both Ed McCarthy and Frank Frink are changed people. They find themselves looking at life very differently. That brings about conflict between them, and an expectation [of what] their friendship is and how it is changing. So there's a certain tension. Cracks

Frank Frink (left) gains a different perspective on life this season.



Expect big changes for Juliana.



Which way will Trade Minister Tagomi go?

start to appear, really. I think cracks are the whole theme of this season. There's cracks with everybody – the idea of what life is or what life was, is very different in season one to season two.

DJ QUALLS (Ed McCarthy) What happens when something changes? You get angry. And then, how do you deal with that anger? But there's also some external forces that are happening as the Resistance movement [in San Francisco] starts to reach out to us – there's also some external things that require my character to break laws. Ed hates those sources of stress and influence, but who who can he direct [his anger] at? He directs it at Frank. He starts to feel things about Frank. I have a feeling it's going to ramp up as we close out season two.

ALEXA DAVALOS (Juliana Crain) Juliana's experience this season is so surprising across the board that I will flat out ruin everything if I talk about it. She's exploring different spaces and faces. She's ever changing of course and her environment is changing – though characters depart and reconnect, you have to remember it's Philip K Dick so there's always some interweaving wherever they are physically, no matter where their

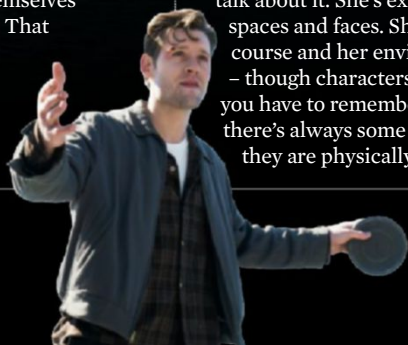
storylines are in a moment. There's an ebb and flow for sure.

CARY-HIROYUKI TAGAWA (Nobusuke Tagomi) Tagomi carries with him that Japanese thing – and I'm speaking from personal experience, it's so genetic. You can't leave it behind. It's not like just dropping your bags and walking across the border. It's like, they're handcuffed to him. So even though it's a completely different universe, he still carries those values, because he's on an internal journey. It doesn't matter which reality; it just becomes a different tweak and twist.

ON THE DEPARTURE OF SHOWRUNNER FRANK SPOTNITZ

ISA DICK HACKETT (executive producer) I can say that I'm entirely grateful to Frank for launching *The Man In The High Castle*. He's still executive producer on the show, but he's not showrunning. We had to consolidate creative to the west coast, we made a change which is difficult midseason and something you typically don't do, but we're all very, very fond of him and value him.

KLEINTANK It all kind of happened so →





John Smith: nastier than his beer-making namesake.

suddenly, that it was a little bit of a shock for all of us. The groundwork he did will always stay. It's the reason why the show is what it is now. But he's given us his blessing, and I don't think it's going to affect the show. I think we have some amazing writers. We have some really like-minded people, we have Isa Dick, and she's incredible – she's Philip K Dick's daughter and she knows everything about this novel. I think season two will be better than season one, in my opinion. But we all love Frank, and we miss him very much.

DAVALOS Frank set the stage. He did the original adaptation and he helped bring it to fruition, so he's always going to be a part of this.

HACKETT There's his DNA in there.

ON EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE REALITIES

DAN PERCIVAL (producer) You will meet Hawthorne Abendsen from the book of *The Man In The High Castle* very early on in the second season. What he gives Juliana Crain will propel the season and open up a depth of understanding about what the films are, but ask so many more questions of the audience to be patient and tolerant and trust us to deliver on a promise. Beyond that, I'm not going to tell you a thing about it!

EVANS We'll dig deeper into the mythology around the films and get deeper into that space than we did in season one. I think it's both interesting and compelling. But it's not overused.

DAVALOS I think it's so much our world but to a point, so the root of the tree is the same. Ultimately it's the branches that change.

“I think season two will be better than season one. But we all miss Frank Spotnitz”

HEATHCOTE It doesn't feel that different. I wasn't in season one, but I watched it, and I've read the scripts for what we've shot so far, and it doesn't feel like some whole crazy new show.

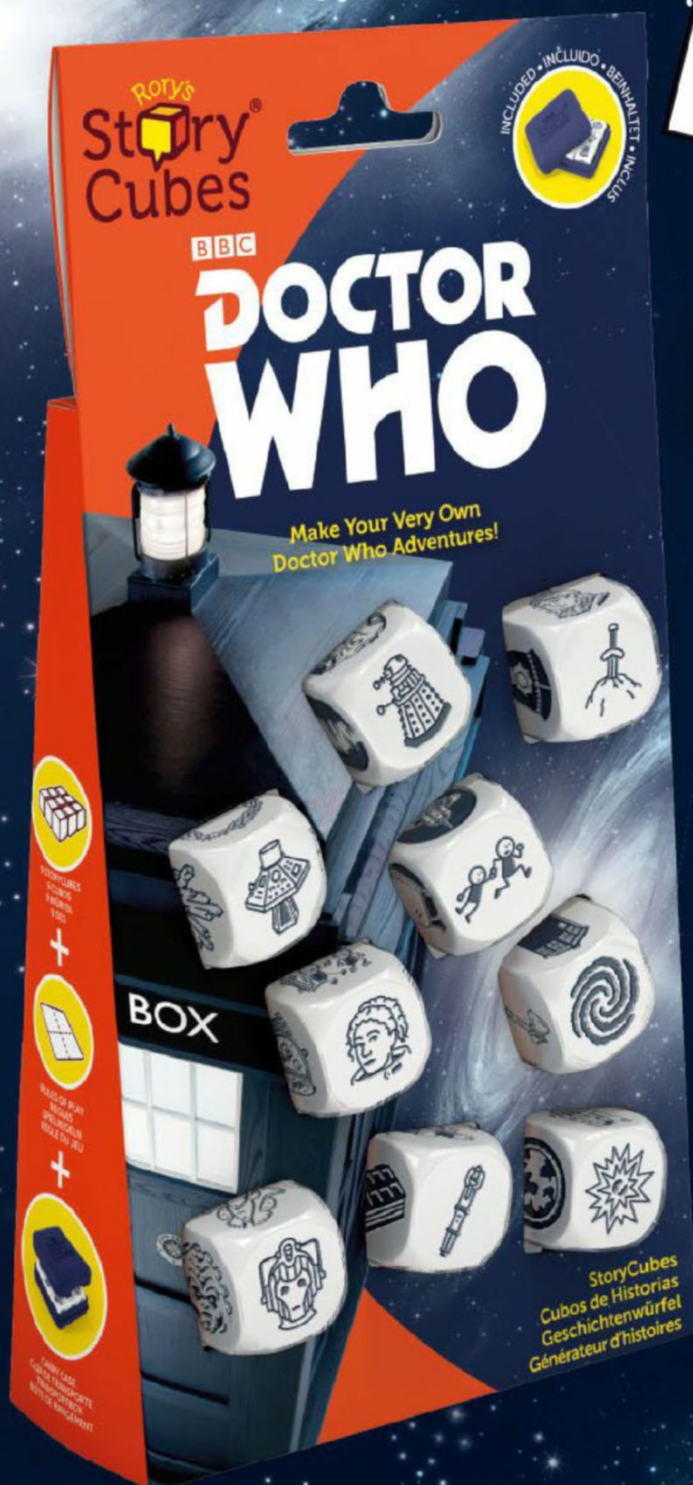
KLEINTANK It adds a sci-fi element to it, but I think it still focuses on the alternate history. I think it brings a lot of hope to these people. Not everybody can travel to this new world, so not many people are going to see it. You'll see it as a viewer via one person's eyes, I can give you that much. I don't think it changes the tone – I think it builds on top of this alternate history, and makes it that much stronger, because for these people it's what they truly want out of life and what they could have.

DAVALOS There are narratives in our show that don't exist in the novel for various reasons – for expansion purposes mainly – but the novel is so incredibly layered, that there is an incredibly vast horizon when it comes to how much of this book we can actually use. And interwoven with all the things we've created there's this beautiful cinematic licence as well as a true respect and diligence to the book. We're scratching the surface really. ●

The Man In The High Castle season two is on Amazon Prime Instant Video from 16 December.



NEW



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STEPH SWAINSTON

The Brit fantasy author tells us about momentous upheavals

Words by Jonathan Wright /// Photography by Will Ireland

On 11 November 2015, while researching savantism and autism for a character, Steph Swainston had an epiphany. Sitting on her floor surrounded by books, she realised she has Asperger syndrome. “Immediately, I knew that every single problem in my life made sense,” she says. “When seen through that lens, there was suddenly a paradigm shift, everything made sense.” There was more. “Repetitive thoughts and worries” that had been “churning” around her mind for years “stopped, immediately, like that, clicked, gone”. A visit to the doctor confirmed her self-diagnosis.

It’s a moment that opened up a new perspective on why she writes the Castle novels, her extraordinary fantasy sequence of immortals battling voracious insects over centuries and which continues in a new volume, *Fair Rebel*. Those with Asperger’s, she explains, often have “special interests” that they obsess over. “[The Castle] has been my Aspie’s special interest my whole life and now I’m just keeping going with it,” she says.

CHILD’S PLAY

It’s a fictional universe she first created when she was just five years old, and first shared with friends as a playground game when she was eight. Over the years, it’s acted as a way of “explaining” and “filtering” the world. It’s also been a way of helping to “read” other people, something those with autism find difficult to a greater or lesser degree when compared to those not on the autistic spectrum.

“You can talk about characters, and you can try and understand the people around you by reflecting them in your imaginary characters,” she says. “You actually become quite good at being a little philosopher, a little people watcher, which is the opposite to the general idea of what Asperger’s people are like – especially the girls, they’re actually quite interested in watching people and trying to understand these interactions because it’s not obvious to us and we can’t take it for granted.”

With *Fair Rebel*, this means exploring two central ideas: the effects of a technological leap on the Castle’s society and the problems that stem from an unequal society. The former comes when the immortals of the Castle, hitherto reliant on bows and swords, begin to use gunpowder, cannons and rifles against the constantly invading, implacable insects. In scenes that deliberately recall the Battle of Messines in 1917, when Allied sappers blew up a German-held ridge by tunnelling into it and planting explosives, we also watch a scheme to vaporise the insects from below unfold.

To research her battle scenes and to make them as vivid as (a big influence) Bernard Cornwell’s *Sharpe* series, Swainston tried her hand at “black powder shooting”. “I wanted to get all the sensations of it, all the smells, all the senses, how it smells of turned earth, how it smells when you’ve been gardening,” she says. “It smells of rich earth, which is the nitrate part of the gunpowder, and rotten eggs as well, which is the sulphur side. The smoke is really heavy, and it drifts down and across the field. It just fills the whole place.”

But what about the grunts who do the shooting? This brings us to the second of the novel’s themes, inequality. In a society where an emperor can make a select few immortal, resentment is inevitable, and in *Fair Rebel* it leads to a violent attempt at overturning the existing order. “I wanted to look at the unhappiness and unsettledness of people in our society who cannot make it into the Castle and cannot go to the top,” Swainston says. “And a lot of people, no matter how hard we try in our society, cannot get anywhere because of their origins.”

CLOSE TO HOME

Despite going to Cambridge, Swainston identifies with those in the precariat. Raised in Bradford in a working-class family, she “was told specifically” at school “that you work really hard, and you’ll get up and out of here”. It never quite worked out that way. Milk round jobs were never offered and she had to return home, where some resented her education. She was, suggests *SFX*, suspended between castes in the English class system.

“That’s definitely how it felt,” she says. “It’s quite brutal. I had people, my friends, saying, ‘Don’t come here anymore.’ And I didn’t think I had changed, but I had seen this life in Cambridge and how good it could be. I saw from the outside people who have now become MPs and so forth, but you cannot ever spend enough money or know their coded language, it’s a totally different culture.”

Instead of joining an elite, she found herself doing “small jobs”. And when she did try to join in, quitting novelising to become a chemistry teacher in 2011, things again didn’t work out, in part because of her Asperger’s: “I found it really hard work trying to deal with loads of people all the time and their expectations of me.”

The anger at all this courses through *Fair Rebel*, but then again it was written before her diagnosis. “It’s kind of like I’ve been born for a year, that’s my new birthday,” she says. “I’m a year old, the new Steph.” And she sounds happy. ●

Fair Rebel is published by Gollancz.

Biodata

Occupation

→ Novelist

Born

→ 1974

From

→ Bradford

Greatest Hits

→ Swainston’s Castle series, largely narrated by drug addict immortal messenger Jant, began with *The Year Of Our War* (2004). China Miéville, among others, is a fan.

Random Fact

→ Swainston’s dad took her up mountains on her birthdays. Aged five, seeing the splendour of snowy Helvellyn in the Lake District, she decided, “I will believe in nature as my god.”



“YOU BECOME
QUITE GOOD
AT BEING A
PHILOSOPHER,
A PEOPLE
WATCHER”





LOIS CLARK

The '90s gave us a slick new TV spin on the Superman legend. Sean Egan soars up, up and away with the people that made it happen

“**was totally not interested. I’d never read a comic book in my life.**”

Such was the reaction of writer and producer Deborah Joy LeVine when she was approached by Warner Brothers with the proposition that she be the showrunner of a new Superman TV series. From this profoundly inauspicious beginning emerged arguably the most revolutionary ever live-action take on the iconic DC Comics character, as well as inarguably one of the most fondly-remembered television series of the 1990s.

“I was always more interested in people’s frailties than their powers. I just think it makes it more interesting,” LeVine tells *SFX*. “I thought about it for a long time and then I came back to them and said, ‘I would like to do a show about unrequited love and I’d like to do more of a character piece and I’d like to call it *Lois & Clark*’.” She had a clear vision for the series: “Lois was screwed up in a lot of ways and Clark had the very basic problem that he was in love with a human and he was an alien and couldn’t tell her his real identity.”

Along with the unusual prominence of Superman’s girlfriend/Clark Kent’s colleague Lois Lane came an unprecedentedly adult and modern approach. In the show’s pilot, Lois emphasises his underling status to the new reporter colleague foisted on her at the *Daily Planet*. “You like to be on top,” shoots back Clark. The pilot also revealed the new show to be post-modern, winking at the viewer about the previously unchallenged tropes of comic books. Example: Clark’s mother – looking at the snug Superman costume she has helped devise for her son – notes, “Well one thing’s for sure: nobody’s going to be looking at your face ... Well, they don’t call them tights for nothing!”



LeVine met no resistance from DC about her radical reinterpretation of their signature character. “We got along great. I read I don’t want to say how many hundred comic books, but I did my research.” It has been theorised that LeVine took her cue from the John Byrne-helmed 1986 DC miniseries *The Man Of Steel*, but, while acknowledging the influence of the “brilliant” Byrne, she says of her vision, “It was an amalgamation of maybe the last five years of comic books.”

There was one suggested innovation, though, for which DC felt society wasn’t quite ready: making *Daily Planet* editor Perry White black. LeVine reveals, “I did get James Earl Jones to say he would do it.” However, at the suggestion of LeVine’s brother Daniel – one of the show’s scriptwriters – White (Lane Smith) was at least turned into an interesting character in his own right via an Elvis Presley obsession.

An unexpected change in approach to the new show came during the process of casting. “Superman, according to the comics and legend and everything else, was a 30-year-old man,” says LeVine. “When Dean auditioned, he totally blew me away.” Former American footballer Dean Cain was 27 but looked younger. “Dean Cain was actually the first person I saw for the role of Clark ... I saw hundreds after that and I never forgot his performance, because he was so genuine, he was so real. We did one of the scenes where he was with his father and they were talking about his future. It was a beautiful scene and he was really, really good. I wanted to go older but he convinced me. Then when Teri Hatcher came, it became a younger show.” →



Choosing a Lois proved to be much easier than casting Clark. "There was a couple of women I was interested in, but she was so fantastic," says LeVine of the future *Desperate Housewives* star. "She really got the character. Teri Hatcher is the most underrated actress ever on television. She had the timing of Lucille Ball." LeVine had only one misgiving, but even that was quickly addressed. "She had long hair, maybe down to her waist. I said, 'You're going to have to cut your hair,' and she was so upset about that. I said, 'Lois Lane wouldn't have your hair. She gets up in the morning and she runs a comb through it and she gets dressed and she runs out for the story.' And next day, she showed up with short hair."



When the double-length LeVine-scripted *Lois & Clark* pilot made the airwaves on 12 September 1993, it was to a gratifying critical reception. "The reviews were the best reviews I ever got for anything I ever wrote in my life." The ratings, though, weren't so pleasing. LeVine attributes this to the network's "incredibly stupid" decision to put the show up against the NBC debut of ecological submarine show *SeaQuest DSV*, a new TV venture by Steven Spielberg. "I think if they had premiered me the following week, I would have right off the bat gotten better ratings."

The ratings improved as disappointed *SeaQuest DSV* viewers began drifting away and found something less solemn on the other side: despite its modernistic slant, *Lois & Clark* was always a fun and life-affirming hour, spurning the sometimes oppressive darkness of modern big-screen takes on Superman.

Robert Singer was brought on board as executive producer from episode eight because, he says, of a feeling on the part of Warner that the programme was "a little disorganised and that the scripts weren't quite as good as they might be." Singer immediately began making changes. "I brought a lot of my people in, like in the art direction area, post-production, that sort of thing. Deborah was talented but it was a big show and I just don't think she had the experience to really mount it at that point."

"He was brought in to basically change the show," laments LeVine of Singer. "He and I clashed from the start. I wanted to do my show, he wanted to do a show about Clark fighting villains ... I don't think he was simpatico at all." A distraught LeVine did not return for season two of the show.

Singer seems puzzled by LeVine's grievances. While he concedes, "We were trying to create more interesting villains," he insists, "I always felt that the key to the success of the show was these two people and their relationship." He adds, "I think there were things that the show needed that in my expertise could be done. I don't recall having any arguments with her about scripts."

Season two saw a wholesale change of writers, which Singer credits for a step-change in the quality of *Lois & Clark* scripts. The recalibrated show downplayed former regular

"I felt strongly that these two should not get together until we're ending the show"



Lois becomes Ultrawoman!

THE LOST CLARK

An update too far?

➔ The Clark Kent of *Lois & Clark* was a fairly cool dude, an approach Deborah Joy LeVine says was worked up between her and Dean Cain, who had never been a fan of Christopher Reeve's geeky portrayal in the movies. In truth, this departure was one of the few weak points in the show's lateral approach to the Superman legend. The juxtaposition of a bumbling, stumbling Clark and a poised Superman was the only thing that had granted even a fig-leaf of plausibility to the fact that the world couldn't see through Clark's pathetic disguise of a pair of specs.



foe Lex Luthor in favour of a wider array of antagonists. It also jettisoned *Planet* gossip columnist Cat Grant as too much of an ancillary character. Taking the role of Jimmy Olsen away from Michael Landes and giving it to Justin Whalin had a different impetus. "The original Jimmy, his agents made some unreasonable demands," Singer says.



Ratings continued their steady improvement. The show was also a success in many territories around the world, including the UK, where the BBC unceremoniously lopped off the *Lois & Clark* part of the title and simply ran it by its sub-title: *The New Adventures Of Superman*.

Warner now upped the ante with a season cliffhanger in which Clark proposed marriage. Upping the ante further, season three opened with Lois responding, "Who's asking? Clark or Superman?" "Always a problem when you're doing Superman," Singer says of the inability of supposedly sharp journalist Lois to spot that her colleague is the last son of Krypton. "So we eased our way into that."

Singer feels the move was a good one, escalating the show's sexual tension. Not such a good move, he believes, was a further landmark decision. "There was a big thing with the audience: 'You've got to get them married.' We resisted that all through season three." The *Lois & Clark* wedding episode was the third episode of season four, broadcast in October 1996. "Probably not the best idea ... A lot of the tension that we created over three seasons was dissipated." LeVine's original five-year plan actually prohibited even a romance. She notes, "Like *Moonlighting*, I really felt very strongly about the fact that these two should not get together until we're ending the show."

The wedding episode brought about a moderate jump in the ratings. This was assisted by the handy cross-media promotion that went with DC simultaneously depicting nuptials in their own universe through the special publication *Superman: The Wedding Album*. However, those ratings were already down by five million compared to the previous year – possibly a disgusted reaction to a third-season tease of a story arc in which Clark married a woman who turned out to be a clone of Lois.

Singer rejects the suggestion that the clone arc harmed the show. "I felt that we were struggling a little bit at the end to try to keep the thing going," he offers. "I think it had run its course."

Nonetheless, Singer says he was disappointed when the decision was made not to give the show a fifth season ("You could plan for a finale"). As the fourth season's last episode (broadcast on 14 June 1997) saw Lois and Clark mysteriously gifted a baby by an unknown figure somehow cognisant of Clark's superpowers, it meant that the show ended with a mystery never to be resolved.

Despite this, the special place of *Lois & Clark* in both TV and Superman history is assured. Singer: "I think – and this is really Deborah – giving a new take to the Superman story was interesting. Even just the play on words in the title tells you that it's going to be a little different. I'm proud of the show, there's no question about that."

LeVine has an office in her home where the *Lois & Clark* posters affixed to the walls consistently inspire misty-eyed reminiscence from visitors. Reflects LeVine, "So many stories of, 'Oh my god, growing up with *Lois & Clark*...' It was a show that people loved, and that makes me happy." ●



Lex Luthor (John Shea) makes his move on Lois.



Dean Cain later showed up in young Supes show *Smallville*.

AMAZON NON- DELIVERY

The Wonder Woman we never saw

➤ Deborah Joy LeVine could conceivably have worked her revisionist magic on another DC icon. "About halfway through the first season of *Lois & Clark*, Warner got the rights to Wonder Woman, so they came to me," she reveals. "The first network we went to was NBC and they bought it in about 10 seconds." NBC, though, never made the pilot episode LeVine wrote. "My Wonder Woman pilot was more about this Amazonian woman who came to the big city and was having problems getting a date. I was trying to humanise her, but that was not the Wonder Woman they were interested in."



Wonder Woman, '70s TV style.



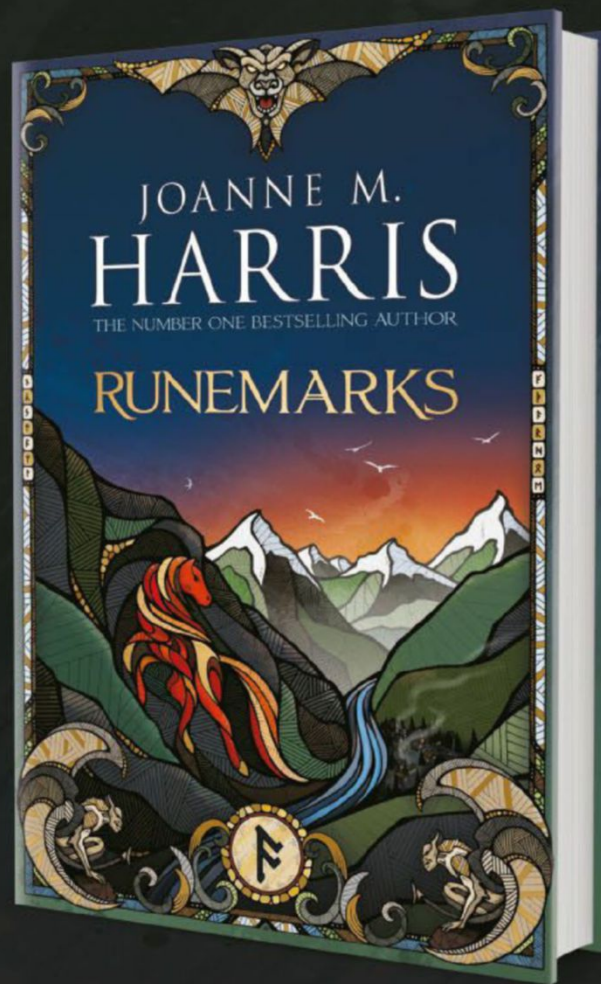
You expected him *not* to help the nuns...?



Bronson Pinchot as recurring baddie the Prankster.



THE OLD GODS HAVE RETURNED



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edited by Ian Berriman

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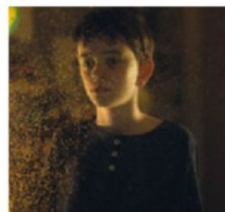
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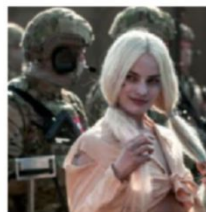
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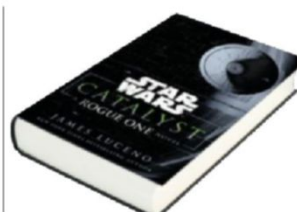
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FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM

Newt Tricks



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 133 minutes

► Director David Yates

► Cast Eddie Redmayne, Katherine Waterston, Dan Fogler, Alison Sudol

◆ **Seven novels and eight movies** just weren't enough – for all the richness and invention of JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, they barely scratched the surface of the author's vast Wizarding World. *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them* expands her magical universe way beyond the grounds of Hogwarts, and rather than feeling like a cynical cash-in, works as an essential addition to the Potterverse.

While *Potter* DNA courses through the movie's veins, this is a very different, well, beast. Set

in 1920s New York, it reveals another take on wizarding life, where Americans of magical heritage lead a highly regulated, undercover existence, "Second Sailemers" campaign to reveal the witches living among ordinary New Yorkers, and strict laws exist to prevent Wizards and Witches marrying No-Majs (the US term for Muggles). Into this alien world comes Newt Scamander (Eddie Redmayne), baffled Englishman abroad, magizoologist and future writer of the Hogwarts textbook that gives the movie its title – he's like David Attenborough with a wand. The film's nominal hook is that, thanks to a case of mistaken suitcase identity, some of Newt's creatures have gone AWOL in the Big Apple. That's really just a bluff, however, because there's much more to

The campaign for a *Salem's Lot* sequel had been stepped up.



Fantastic Beasts than that. In fact it's when the slightly flabby "chase the (mostly) cute critters!" action of the first half evolves into a more sinister threat that *Fantastic Beasts* really comes to life.

The period setting is stunning. Whereas the *Harry Potter* movies exist in a world where magic is ever-present and in your face, here the wizards integrate with a recognisable No-Maj New York. So Director of Magical Security Percival Graves's (Colin Farrell) clothes are designed to sit in the sweet spot where a Fed's trench coat and wizarding robes intersect; we visit an ordinary apartment where the only significant concession to the magical life is

“This is just a first act building to something bigger”

the clothes ironing themselves in the background; and the real-life Woolworth Building is a front for the vast, incognito Magical Congress of the United States of America (MACUSA), a fantastical, retro take on the *Men in Black* HQ.

Scripted by Rowling herself, *Fantastic Beasts* also has great fun



Frank's selfie would just about do for Tinder.

adapting the tropes of other movie genres to fit into her world – moments like a speakeasy encounter with a shady goblin gangster, or cop/criminal shoot-outs that substitute wands for guns. Whether it's a goblin buffing wands in the MACUSA foyer, or a casual aside about Newt working with dragons on the Russian front during World War I, the level of detail is awe-inspiring, almost overwhelming at times – especially when you consider the numerous callbacks to the *Harry Potter* books.

It would be easy to succumb to the cliché of successive *Potter* movies by saying it's "darker", but that wouldn't be accurate. Yes,

there are some grown-up themes – and plenty of social commentary if you look for it – but there are also brilliant gags, silliness, slapstick and many chances to engage your sense of wonder. The character dynamics are also refreshingly different to *Potter's* – not least because the lead quartet are adults. Redmayne's performance (which sees him defiantly avoiding eye contact throughout) is undeniably the most showy, but it's co-stars Katherine Waterston, Alison Sudol, and Dan Fogler (funny and likeable as a No-Maj caught up in the magical shenanigans) who make you care, and provide an emotional anchor for the story.

Rowling's already revealed that *Fantastic Beasts* is the start of a five-film series, and you're never in any doubt that this is just a first act building to something bigger – we'll have to wait and see if the loose ends in the story are setting up future movies or merely plot holes. But it's undeniably exciting watching a Pottermore movie unfold when you have absolutely no idea where it's going. With *The Cursed Child* selling out in the West End, and a new movie franchise to look forward to, the Wizarding World hasn't felt so vibrant in years. **Richard Edwards**

i Rowling revealed in 2007 that Dumbledore was once in love with the *Fantastic Beasts* series' Big Bad, Gellert Grindelwald.



DAVID YATES

Director of *Fantastic Beast And Where To Find Them*



What made you return to the *Potter* universe?

→ I read the script and fell in love with it. It felt fresh and yet very nostalgic. It was a push-pull feeling, like "I kind of feel like I'm coming home" but then it feels very different.

How did you find working with JK more directly?

→ With the *Potter* movies she would come towards the end to watch the movie and she'd always read the scripts and give thoughts. But in this case she's producing and she's writing and she's very present. She's supportive and pragmatic and understands how the process of filmmaking works. A real pleasure.

What made Eddie the right choice for Newt?

→ He was a shoe-in. We built the world around Eddie. As soon as we had Eddie, it was just the process of bringing people in to work with Eddie, to see who would work best with him chemically.

Fantastic Beasts stars adults rather than children – is that a big change?

→ They're all children, really. There's a purity about these characters. They're geeky outsiders of this world. They're not superstars, they don't have the fanciest jobs in the wizarding world. They're kind of us, basically. **Stephen Kelly**

CINEMA

A MONSTER CALLS

The Tree Of Strife



▶ **RELEASED 1 JANUARY**

12A | 108 minutes

▶ Director JA Bayona

▶ Cast Lewis MacDougall, Sigourney Weaver, Felicity Jones, Liam Neeson

❖ **We all love a good weepie**, right? But most of us are far too cynical and self-aware to give in to a cleansing, cathartic cinema-cry. We know we're being manipulated, after all. Those violins are there to twang our heartstrings, we can see the sad twist coming a mile off, and do we *really* care about that character who's just carked it...?

But sometimes, when a film's made from a layered, thoughtful book, the adaptation can carry over those depths, making our chins wobble despite our best intentions. Such is the case with Patrick Ness's excellent 2011

Young Adult novel *A Monster Calls*, adapted by the author himself and directed with glorious sensitivity by JA Bayona. That sensitivity is much-needed, too, because without it, the delicate balance between what is reality and what is a whopping great hunk of computer-generated fantasy could have fallen flat on its face.

The "Monster" in question is an ancient tree, voiced by Liam Neeson, who regularly visits young Conor (Lewis MacDougall) as his mother (Felicity Jones) battles cancer. Conor doesn't get on with his grandmother (Sigourney Weaver) and his dad has abandoned him for a life in the US, so things are looking bleak for the young lad – a bunch of bullies picking on him at school don't help, either. However, as Conor flails, the Monster tells him stories – using inventive animation and

"You gotta save me, kid – that Heathrow lot wanna chop me down!"



CGI – and teaches him how to deal with his troubles.

The film works because MacDougall is so convincing as he interacts with the (often terrifying) tree, and Weaver is so delicately nuanced as Conor's grandma. Things do get mawkish whenever Jones is on screen – so much so that you start to dread her showing

up – and not all the kids playing the bullies are as competent as the lead. You can overlook these tiny flaws, however, because by the time the finale comes you'll still be doing a solid impression of Niagara Falls. **Jayne Nelson**

i Spider-Man Tom Holland was a stand-in for the Monster, having previously worked with the director on *The Impossible*.



Doc Brown regretted travelling to the dull 1930s funeral.

I AM NOT A SERIAL KILLER

The Dexter-Files



▶ **RELEASED 9 DECEMBER**

15 | 104 minutes

▶ Director Billy O'Brien

▶ Cast Max Records, Christopher Lloyd, Laura Fraser, Christina Baldwin

❖ **There's more than a hint of Dexter** about this indie horror thriller. Like Jeff Lindsay's creation, it features a protagonist with sociopathic tendencies, who's devised a set of rules to help him fit in; a character who could easily be the villain, struggling to fill the role of hero.

Max Records plays John, the troubled teen who investigates after his town is struck by a series of killings, and discovers elderly neighbour Bill (Christopher

Lloyd) could be a case for Mulder and Scully...

The plot doesn't exactly break new ground, but remains compelling, thanks to strong central performances. Records is excellent as the awkward yet likeable John, and Lloyd is downright creepy at times.

Hints of a romantic subplot for John remain strangely under-developed, but director Billy O'Brien creates a strong sense of place, and has great success imbuing the everyday – the squeak of an exercise machine, smoke from a factory – with sinister resonance. **Ian Berriman**

i Director Billy O'Brien shot a test with Max Records (star of *Where The Wild Things Are*) back in 2011, when he was only 13.

Reviews



Never get Baby Bio and shampoo mixed up.

MOANA

Rock in the boat



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

PG | 113 minutes

▶ Directors **Ron Clements, Don Hall**
John Musker, Chris Williams

▶ Cast **Auli'i Cravalho,**
Dwayne Johnson, Jemaine Clement

▶ **Disney have teamed up** with The Rock to make an animated adventure set among the beautiful Pacific Ocean islands, with songs co-written by the current golden child of all things musical, Lin-Manuel Miranda. Count us in! Although considering this isn't Dwayne Johnson's first time voicing a toon (see *Planet 51*), we've seen Disneyfied Pacific islands before (*Lilo & Stitch*) and Miranda is most famous for *Hamilton*, a musical that's to date only wowed Americans, perhaps this isn't the dead cert they think it is.

However, you can ignore our initial cynicism, because *Moana* is a scream. The only downside is that the story's fairly bog-standard: the daughter of a chieftain rebels against her rigid life, goes on a quest to save her people, gets two sidekicks (one a Loki-like demigod named Maui; one a brainless

chicken) and sings as she has adventures. At first you're dazzled by the gorgeous animation but bored by the plot – Disney heroines *really* have to stop singing wistfully about wanting more from their lives – but then, happily, once Moana has bumped into Johnson's Maui, all hell breaks loose. You won't be bored again.

Johnson has the time of his life voicing the cheeky demigod as they encounter everything from warlike coconuts to crabs blinged-up in gold like Smaug, and you'll laugh like you're in the audience of a BBC primetime sitcom trying to get heard on the soundtrack.

The biggest mystery is how teenage newcomer Auli'i Cravalho as Moana manages to hold her own against Johnson's histrionics, but she does – even if both characters are then outclassed by Hei Hei, that goofy chicken (voiced – or should that be “clucked”? – by *Firefly*'s Alan Tudyk). This sunny delight is probably a better antidote to winter than summer itself. **Jayne Nelson**

i The film's been renamed *Oceania* in Italy. This might be because there was a famous Italian porn star named Moana...

ON SALE NOW!



Your essential,
180-page guide
to the best films
ever made

SUICIDE SQUAD

The Affray Team

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2016 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

▶ Director David Ayer

▶ Cast Will Smith, Margot Robbie, Jared Leto, Viola Davis

❗ **Bad news if you're** psychologically dependent on homicidal crime clowns: for all Jared Leto's protestations that a Joker's-worth of unseen footage littered the cutting room floor, you'll receive precious little extra puddin' in the Extended Cut of *Suicide Squad*. On the brighter side: you're Harley Quinn, and you rock a mean pair of shorts.

Director David Ayer always maintained that the theatrical cut was the definitive one, anyway. "There's no parallel universe version of this movie," he insisted as last summer's release was accompanied by mutterings of studio-mandated interventions in the editing suite. One persistent whisper held that the movie had been handed over to the team that had cut its confident, energising trailer, remixing Ayer's original vision in favour of a breezier take, heavy on the needle-drops and one-liners, a hasty piece of tonal surgery after the backlash that met the grim *Batman V Superman*.

If Ayer's original vision ever existed it hasn't been reinstated

here. *Suicide Squad* remains a choppy, frustrating experience, introducing its scuzzy antiheroes in a barrage of quick-cut, graphics-heavy, slyly-soundtracked origin stories. It's like being hurled headfirst through a longbox of random DC back issues while your iPod goes haywire.

In fairness this gives the film a certain comic book energy: there's something commendable about the way it casually drops the reality of extra-dimensional sorceresses in a burst of blink-and-you'll-miss-it info-text. It's not remotely ashamed of its world: it mines the weirder corners of the DCU in a way that would make Christopher Nolan shudder (though you have to ask: why would the government think a bunch of GBH-favouring psycho-criminals are the best way to deal with... a witch?).

The Extended Cut clings to the beats of the original, its additions less than essential. A good gag glimpsed in the trailer makes its way back in. A handful of scenes are allowed to breathe again (the Squad's bonding session in the bar benefits from some extra dialogue). The most noticeable inclusion is a flashback sequence of Margot Robbie's mentally-disintegrating Harley pursuing the Joker on a motorbike.



"Do I have something in my teeth?"



The local trick-or-treaters really went all out.

More Leto and Robbie is a good thing. Leto reinvents Batman's nemesis as a bling-bedecked ghoul, his laugh the pained creak of a rusting asylum door, while Robbie plays Harley like a feral spring-breaker. Charismatic and infinitely watchable, they're a pair of firecrackers hurled into a movie that soon heads into a narrative death-spiral.

Because *Suicide Squad* is, ultimately, a clutter and a mess, its story choices faultlines that could never be fixed in the editing suite. With its militarised, boots-on-the-ground vibe it's clear David Ayer

“Suicide Squad is, ultimately, a clutter and a mess”

wants to make a war movie but the mission's weak, pitting our overload of protagonists against a laughable army of blackberry-headed stooge-beasts – dispatched with tedious ease – and climaxing



with one of those generic swirly sky-things that always feel like writer's block made physical reality.

It's a strong cast and there are flashes of oddball charm – scaly cannibal Killer Croc declaring “I’m beautiful!” hints at the winning film that could have been – but when you lose count of the number of crashing helicopters in a movie you know you’re in trouble.

• **Extras** The Blu-ray has a solid serving of featurettes, built from cast and crew interviews and behind-the-scenes footage. “Task Force X: One Team, One Mission” compares the cinematic Squad

with their comic book predecessors, including an interview with DC writer John Ostrander, who revived the title in the '80s. “Chasing The Real” looks at how the filmmakers were determined to stay grounded (er... there’s a bleedin’ witch!). “Joker And Harley: It Couple Of The Underworld” is worth it for some diplomatic comments about Jared Leto’s notorious process, losing himself in his role off-camera and pranking other members of the cast (“I kind of had to say goodbye to Jared,” admits David Ayer). “Squad Strength And Skills” concerns the

physical training the cast endured. “Armed To The Teeth” is a look at the film’s props and weaponry. “This Is Gonna Get Loud: The Epic Battles Of *Suicide Squad*” tackles filming the action sequences. You also get “The Squad Declassified” – a clips-based, all-purpose piece of promo fluff, and a brief, you-had-to-be-there gag reel that would barely raise a smirk from the Joker. Note that if you buy the DVD edition, you just get the theatrical cut. **Nick Setchfield**

i Look out for the John F Ostrander Federal Building, named for the comic writer who created this version of the team.

BAT'S THE WAY TO DO IT

Harley Quinn's not alone...

ACE'S BASEBALL BAT

• In 1989 *Doctor Who* “Remembrance Of The Daleks”, the Seventh Doctor super-charges companion Ace’s bat by exposing it to Gallifreyan super-weapon the Hand of Omega. This allows her to beat the living daylights out of a Dalek!

THE KIRK GIBSON JR SLUGGER 2000

• Wielded by Griff Tannen in *Back To The Future Part II*, this unusual bat – named after an LA Dodgers player – could be hidden away, then telescopically extended to twice its original size.

LUCILLE

• *The Walking Dead*’s brutal Negan named his barbed wire-wrapped bat after his dead wife. In the comics (spoilers ahead), he eventually has to replace it, and smears the new version with zombie guts so that anyone hit will get infected.

THE Z-WACKER

• Negan got there first in the comics, but on TV Syfy zombie show *Z Nation* beat him to it. Heroine Addy Carver’s weapon of choice is an aluminium bat turned into a mace by adding spikes made from beer cans.



DRINKING GAME

Knock back a beverage of your choice every time...

- Someone drops the F-bomb.
- Reverend Anderson drinks some booze, smokes a fag, plays poker or lamps someone.
- A possession victim levitates, or vomits the CGI equivalent of pea soup.
- Someone mentions the restraining order Kyle's wife has in place against him. Knock back another shot if he goes round to her house anyway.
- There's a sinister extreme close-up of an eye.
- Kyle drips his own blood into someone's mouth.

Neither man was about to admit to breaking wind.

OUTCAST

Season One

When in Rome...

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 12 DECEMBER

2016 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Creator Robert Kirkman

▶ Cast Patrick Fugit, Philip Glenister, Wrenn Schmidt, Kate Lyn Sheil, David Denman, Brent Spiner

❖ **Don't know about you, but at** this stage every time Satan spawns a direct-to-video movie with a title like *The Exorcism Of (Insert Girl's Name Here)* we feel like splashing holy water about and screaming, "Begone, tedious old tropes!" If you're of the same mind, the prospect of a series that recycles all the clapped-out rigmarole of casting out demons might have you reaching for your crucifix – even if it is the work of *Walking Dead* creator Robert Kirkman.

And for the first couple of its ten instalments, as the mysteriously gifted Kyle Barnes (Patrick Fugit) teams up with unconventional priest Reverend Anderson (*Life On Mars'* Philip Glenister) to expel evil forces from the small town of Rome, West Virginia, leaving a trail of levitations and CGI vomit in their wake, you'd be forgiven for concluding that Kirkman's adaptation of his own comic (which hews close to the original, often providing an exact match with its panels) has little to offer beyond more of the same old same old.

However, as the season progresses, *Outcast* becomes increasingly intriguing, as it becomes clear that there's a bigger picture here than you find in the

average possession horror, and that this is a show that deals in shades of grey. One character, for example, actually *welcomes* the fact that his wife's been possessed, and makes the case for it being a positive thing – and after a while you start to wonder if he might even have a point.

Glenister might seem an odd choice to play an American priest, but he impresses as the potty-mouthed Anderson, delivering tubthumping fire-and-brimstone sermons in charismatic style, in a surprisingly convincing Southern accent – only occasionally might you find yourself wondering if the Rev's voice just modulated into Gene Hunt. The tortured Kyle's struggle for reconciliation with his estranged wife is affecting. There's

strong support from the likes of Wrenn Schmidt as Kyle's sister Megan and Reg E Cathey as the local sheriff. And the growing prominence of *Star Trek: The Next Generation's* Brent Spiner as a sinister figure who may or not be Old Nick himself adds another layer of fascination.

Outcast also looks stunning, thanks to its grungy, gloomy cinematography. Add some compelling mysteries (what exactly is "The Merge" – or the exact nature of Kyle's power, for that matter?) and shocking out-of-left-field twists and you have a series which, while probably not fated to outdo Kirkman's zombie saga for longevity, certainly has considerable promise. Here's hoping it isn't dispatched to hell anytime soon.

❖ **Extras** Ten short "Inside The Episode" pieces (24 minutes); deleted scenes; a few brief promotional pieces. **Ian Berriman**

i Philip Glenister's dad John was a TV director. Credits include *The Six Wives Of Henry VIII* and Dennis Potter's *Casanova*.



"Quick! Our Reader's Digest is here!"

TRANSFORMERS: THE MOVIE

More than meets the eye

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 12 DECEMBER

1986 | PG | Blu-ray

▶ Director Nelson Shin

▶ Cast Orson Welles, Robert Stack, Leonard Nimoy, Susan Blu

BLU-RAY DEBUT "Every time I see it, it's a different movie," says story consultant Flint Dille during this 30th anniversary Steelbook edition's in-depth making-of documentary. We'll say. Watching *Transformers: The Movie* three decades later is an odd experience – "different" barely covers it. Even if you're coming to it as an adult fan who grew up with the VHS, this Blu-ray will blow your mind.

Firstly, it looks gorgeous – better even than it did at the cinema. Secondly, it's unlike any modern kids' blockbuster. Not just structurally (we're thrown face-first into the action) but in terms of how far it goes narratively. Imagine if *Star Wars Episode VIII* opened with BB-8 being destroyed by a Stormtrooper, and you're on the way to what this film would be like in the modern market. But mainly it'll fry your circuits because this surreal, hair-metal-soundtracked toy advert is arguably the most '80s film ever made.

• **Extras** An excellent package includes a conversational commentary track between Dille, director Nelson Shin and voice artist Susan Blu, five fun featurettes, animated storyboards and that brilliant doc (46 minutes). **Sam Ashurst**

Planet-eater Unicron was Orson Welles's last movie role. He died five days after recording his dialogue.



Looking back, he regretted squeezing the spot.

FEAR THE WALKING DEAD Season Two

Lost at sea

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2016 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Creators Dave Erickson, Robert

Kirkman

▶ Cast Kim Dickens, Cliff Curtis, Frank Dillane, Alysia Debnam-Carey

• **Fear The Walking Dead's** first season was a slow-burn success. Essentially an intense zombie flick split into six parts, it had the courage of its convictions when it came to its high concept (watching the zombie outbreak start and spread), delivering steady, deliberate pacing – even saving its best character (Colman Domingo's magnificent Victor Strand) for the last two episodes. But, despite its strengths, it was poorly received, with viewers switching off before the flesh hit the fan.

Sadly, if there's anything *Fear The Walking Dead's* second season teaches us, it's what we should really be afraid of is audience feedback. If you liked the first season, you'll hate this. Hell, if you hated the first season you'll hate

this. Despite a decent set-up (our heroes start off at sea, dodging floating zombies and human pirates) the season's first half has a desperate feel, chucking in as many setpieces as possible in increasingly illogical attempts to stop viewers from zoning (and tuning) out. The second half is even worse, with *Lost*-esque flashbacks attempting to build intrigue, but generally falling flat.

What made the first season so successful was its forensic focus; this feels more erratic than a zombie rolling down a hill. Still, big brother *The Walking Dead* survived its awful second season, so let's hope *Fear* gets a similar chance to atone.

• **Extras** Disappointing: just webseries *Flight 462* and a short Making Of featurette for each episode (all previously available online), with none of the commentaries or deleted scenes from the US release. **Sam Ashurst**

Season two used the water tanks at Baja Studios in Mexico – built by James Cameron when he was making *Titanic*.



Yet Granny Jones still loved Christmas.

DREAMS

The Contemplate-ful Eight

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1990 | PG | Blu-ray

▶ Director Akira Kurosawa

▶ Cast Akira Terao, Mitsunori Isaki, Chishu Ryu, Martin Scorsese

• **It's a nightmare scenario:** you get stuck on a train next to someone who spends two hours recounting their dreams. But what if said travelling companion was one of the leading filmmakers of the 20th century?

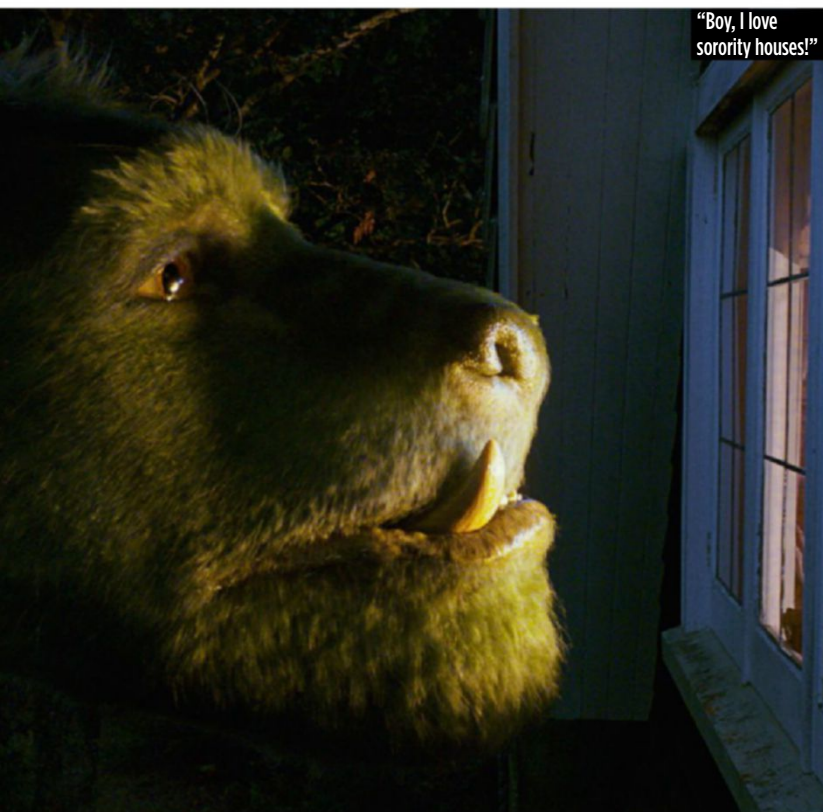
Released in 1990, when Akira Kurosawa was 80, this film dramatises eight of the director's recurring dreams. Some draw on Japanese folklore. Others make statements about pollution, modern life or art. All but one have fantastical elements.

Dreams is quite unlike Kurosawa's best-known works, lacking the narrative drive or rapid cutting of a film like *The Seven Samurai*; these slow-moving vignettes are practically plotless, shot in long takes with minimal camera movement. What it does have, in spades, is visual spectacle – a sequence where a man wanders through Van Gogh's paintings is a particularly vivid highlight – and contemplative beauty.

• **Extras** A two-hour behind-the-scenes doc reveals lo-fi methods (like dyeing a river blue!); an academic commentary gives cultural context; two crew interviews provide insights into Kurosawa's modus operandi (33 minutes); a 2011 doc sees 11 directors discuss Kurosawa's influence (52 minutes).

Ian Berriman

Martin Scorsese plays Vincent Van Gogh. He took a day out from working on *Goodfellas* to film his scenes.



PETE'S DRAGON

Twee-less Elliott

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 5 DECEMBER

2016 | PG | Blu-ray/DVD/download

▶ Director David Lowery

▶ Cast Bryce Dallas Howard, Robert Redford, Oakes Fegley, Karl Urban

With Disney on a roll

converting its cartoon back catalogue to live-action/CG blends, *Pete's Dragon* is the oddity, as it was already a mixture of real humans and an animated creature. Here, though, director David Lowery gives the story a cosy, folksy feel, ditching the gurning green Elliott for something that resembles a cross between a cat, a dog and Falkor from *The NeverEnding Story*.

In place of the original's tale of a mistreated lad fleeing his hillbilly foster family, we get one about an orphan who's been living rough in the forest for years with

just the dragon for company. Lowery aims for more realism, but it's still a fable about family and magic, all landscaped by some beautiful foliage.

The environmental message may not be as subtle as it could be, but the cast is solid, particularly Bryce Dallas Howard, a leathery Robert Redford and young Oakes Fegley, who make for a likeable main trio. A fine addition to the canon of movies that play well on a lazy, wet Sunday afternoon.

▶ **Extras** Commentary by the director, co-writer and two cast; Lowery reading from the diary he kept during filming (seven minutes); deleted scenes (nine minutes), a two-minute bit about designing Elliott; two music videos.

James White

i Robert Redford rescued a neglected horse from one of the locations. The Horse Whisperer is alive, people!

GHOSTBUSTERS

High spirits

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

2016 | 12 | 4K Blu-ray/Blu-ray 3D/Blu-ray/DVD/download/VOD

▶ Director Paul Feig

▶ Cast Melissa McCarthy, Kristen Wiig, Kate McKinnon, Leslie Jones

▶ **If you're going to reinvent a much-loved movie classic, *Ghostbusters* is a decent blueprint for how to do it. It's utterly respectful to the source material – all the iconography and hardware are satisfyingly familiar – yet it's brave enough to go off and carve its own storytelling path.**

Director/writer Paul Feig's decision to make the spook-hunting quartet female proves a masterstroke, instantly establishing the movie as something different – why try to ape the unique magic of the original when even *Ghostbusters 2*

couldn't do it? Like its predecessor, this *Ghostbusters* is incredibly funny and quotable, but the tone is entirely different; less snarky and reliant on one-liners, a tad warmer, perhaps. There are also clever additions to the mythology, like a human antagonist who provides a backstory for New York's increased, er, spirituality.

But mainly it's the perfectly cast stars who make it work, particularly Kate McKinnon as wonderfully odd engineering genius Holtzmann, and Chris Hemsworth, who shows off previously untapped comedic chops as hilariously dim receptionist Kevin. So ignore the internet moaners who complained about their ruined childhoods – this is one of the best blockbusters of 2016.

▶ **Extras** The Blu-ray and iTunes versions feature five fun, in-depth



The Next Great Magician had its winner.

featurettes (totalling 50 minutes) on creating the ghosts, the new Ghostbusting team, the visual effects, Chris Hemsworth's Kevin and the messy process of creating slime. Paul Feig turns up for two entertaining commentaries, one with co-writer Katie Dippold, the other with assorted department heads. You also get over 80 minutes of deleted and alternate scenes

(some of which also appear in the 18 minutes-longer extended cut on the disc); gag and alternate take reels; and a photo gallery. A well-stocked DVD gets both chat-tracks, three of the featurettes, the alternate takes reel and the gallery. **Richard Edwards**

i The movie's codename was *Flapjack* – previously an alias Feig used for the score on *Life Sold Separately*, his first film.



Don't go into the light! Um, or the dark.

LIGHTS OUT

Into Darkness

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ RELEASED 12 DECEMBER

2016 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD/VOD/
download

▶ Director David F Sandberg

▶ Cast Teresa Palmer, Gabriel

Bateman, Alexander DiPersia

Like several recent horror movies, *Lights Out* started off as a short. After about 45 minutes you may find yourself questioning whether it should have stayed as one.

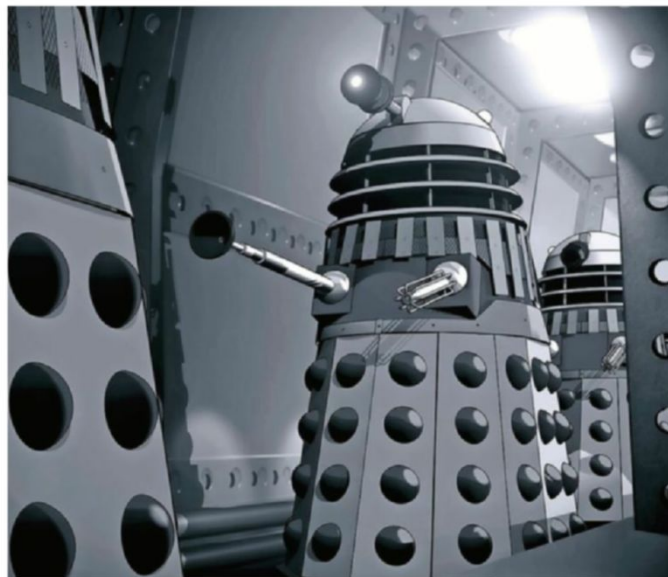
Both the Swedish short and this US feature are built on a deeply creepy idea: a mysterious *something* that only becomes visible when you turn off the lights. And it can make the lights fail... Bad news, here, for rock chick Rebecca, forced to play mom to her kid brother.

Sadly, *Lights Out* thoroughly demystifies its menace far too early, with the Big Box of Backstory (literally) pulled out barely 35 minutes in. Pretty soon about all we *don't* know is its inside leg measurement.

A tense final 20 minutes compensate, as Rebecca navigates a darkened basement using a conveniently placed giant blacklight. There's something eerie about the cold blue glow it projects, and neat about the way it reveals hidden secrets. And thankfully, she *doesn't* have to venture into a teenage boy's bedroom... now that'd be truly horrifying.

Extras Just deleted scenes (14 minutes), including a seven-minute epilogue – this is not at all bad, and leaving it in would have left the film feeling less abbreviated. **Ian Berriman**

A week after the crew finished the basement scenes, the house where they filmed caught fire... Spoooooook.



He dreamed of escaping this rut and setting up an organic farm.

DOCTOR WHO THE POWER OF THE DALEKS Re-an-i-mate! Re-an-i-mate!

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ RELEASED OUT NOW!

1966 | PG | DVD/VOD/download

▶ Director Charles Norton

▶ Cast Patrick Troughton, Anneke Wills,
Michael Craze, Bernard Archard

The BBC have used animation and audio to plug gaps in B&W adventures before, but this is the first time they've recreated a missing story in its entirety.

This six-parter was Patrick Troughton's debut, so there's obvious appeal in seeing how his Doctor was introduced. But the story is just as interesting for what it does to the Daleks. After a Dalek capsule is dug out of a swamp on a colony planet, an obsessive scientist revives one of the creatures within, which then revives more of its kind... With the Daleks preying upon human weakness as they pretend to be benign, David Whitaker's script emphasises a talent for cunning and manipulation we hadn't really seen before. The setup doesn't entirely convince – quite what the colony's "rebels" are rebelling

against is frustratingly unclear – but embedding the Daleks within human powerplays is very effective.

The animation is generally a success too. Human character movement feels a bit Gerry Anderson-puppet, but there's a step change whenever the Daleks glide in. The use of widescreen rather than a 4:3 TV ratio will trouble purists, but neither the direction or editing style feel anachronistic. Hopefully this will give new life to the *Who* range – fingers crossed for Whitaker's "The Evil Of The Daleks" next.

Extras The BBC Store version comes with a rather bland Making Of (23 minutes), surviving fragments (eight minutes), animation tests, live-action reference footage and a gallery. The DVD adds cast/crew commentary, a telesnap (off-screen photos) reconstruction, Dalek voice session recordings, script PDFs and alternate sound mixes. **Ian Berriman**

Companions Anneke Wills and Michael Craze teased the new arrival by wearing "Come Back Bill Hartnell" t-shirts on-set.



Fine-tuning the Starship Enterprise.

THE RODDENBERRY VAULT

That Which Survives

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ RELEASED OUT NOW!

1966-1969 | 12 | Blu-ray

▶ Creator Gene Roddenberry

▶ Cast William Shatner, Leonard

Nimoy, DeForest Kelley

Marking 50 years of *Star Trek*, here's yet another chance to own 12 classic episodes of the '60s show, from the fourth-dimensional heartbreak of "The City On The Edge Of Forever" to Kirk/Gorn grudge-match "Arena". But the real action lies elsewhere on this box set...

Extras An excavation of Gene Roddenberry's private archive has yielded the motherlode of unseen footage: discarded scenes, alternate takes, cast crack-ups and behind-the-scenes miniature-wrangling. The 23rd century's bright colours may have faded in these raw dailies but there's a thrill in watching brand new vintage *Trek*: McCoy confronts Khan, Sulu laughs about Asian cinematic stereotypes and Kirk shares an even more passionate lip-lock with Edith Keeler.

This archival gold bolsters an essential three-part documentary, "Revisiting A Classic" (90 minutes), which interviews *Trek* royalty from Shatner to DC Fontana, and effects-focused featurette "Strange New Worlds" (27 minutes). Plus: three new commentaries, isolated music scores and 21 minutes of pure unseen footage. **Nick Setchfield**

Alongside CS Forester's *Hornblower* novels, Roddenberry was also inspired by AE van Vogt's *Space Beagle* stories.

HOME ENTERTAINMENT



Trouser pockets: bloody brilliant.

CODENAME ICARUS

It adds up to a conspiracy



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1981 | VOD/download

▶ Director Marilyn Fox

▶ Cast Barry Angel, Jack Galloway,

Peter Cellier, Philip Locke

BBC STORE Maths can be fun.

And being good at it can get you a spot at an exclusive school in the countryside run by eccentric teachers who call pupils "sir" and are known by their surnames in return. That's what happens to grumpy youth Martin Smith (Barry Angel) in this SF-tinged, five-part BBC children's serial, at any rate.

Martin is a whiz at numbers, bizarrely unrecognised by his thicke maths teacher, who gets what could be a big break. But might benefactors the Icarus Foundation be responsible for the dead birds mardy Martin finds? Could they be behind a plan to build a super-bomb using young minds? Could be...

Codename Icarus is a kids' drama for kids who could concentrate. It's quite slow and talky and often a little staid (and unusually for a children's TV drama features some plot strands entirely inhabited by adults). The mystery mildly intrigues but things rarely move at full pelt, and Barry Angel's one-note, whingey performance doesn't enhance it.

If you've fond memories of watching this as a youngster then you might not be able to resist having a peek at it once more, but it's not classic.

Russell Lewin

i Writer Richard Cooper also created ITV serial *Knights Of God*, set in a 2020 Britain ruled by a fascist order.



Fact: this wall pattern was in 12 *Doctor Who* stories!

THE ADVENTURE GAME Series One

Doog yrev



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1980 | VOD/download

▶ Creator Patrick Dowling

▶ Cast Moira Stuart, Charmian

Gradwell, Chris Leaver, Ian Messiter

BBC STORE If you're over 40,

mention of *The Adventure Game* will probably send you into a nostalgic reverie. Hailing from a time when watching people performing team-building exercises was somehow considered mass entertainment, this sci-fi-themed teatime gameshow each week transported three minor celebs to an alien planet to pit their wits against the reptilian Argonds' fiendish puzzle rooms.

Series one sees the show yet to develop many of its most fondly-remembered features: the talking aspidistra; the Aussie who talks backwards; the BBC Micro-powered peril of the Vortex. Its "star guests" are often pretty low-wattage – *Blake's 7*'s Paul Darrow (who, uniquely, manages to maintain an air of suave throughout), is about as good as it gets. It's cheap as chips

– pretty much everything on-screen is visibly battered. And the puzzles are often ridiculously over-complicated.

But even in this prototype form, *The Adventure Game* remains utterly charming. There's something quintessentially British about watching grown adults mucking about with ping pong balls, weights and magnets, their bafflement is amusing, and this world has an endearingly whimsical, Douglas Adams-ian feel to it.

Even the absence of episode two (wiped) and ropey picture quality of episode five – clearly sourced from a viewer's VHS – won't stop a stupid grin spreading across your face as you watch Maggie Philbin trying to traverse a pool with some planks, or Moira Stuart playing the coconuts in a balaclava. It's a shame only four instalments are available to stream from BBC Store. Come on BBC, give us a proper DVD box set of every surviving episode! **Ian Berriman**

i Ian Messiter, who played Argond ruler the Rango in series one, also devised Radio 4 panel game *Just A Minute*.



Seconds later the horse bared its bum.

THE MOON STALLION

Not pony



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1978 | VOD/download

▶ Director Dorothea Brooking

▶ Cast Sarah Sutton, David Haig,

John Abineri, Caroline Goodall

BBC STORE Revisiting "classic"

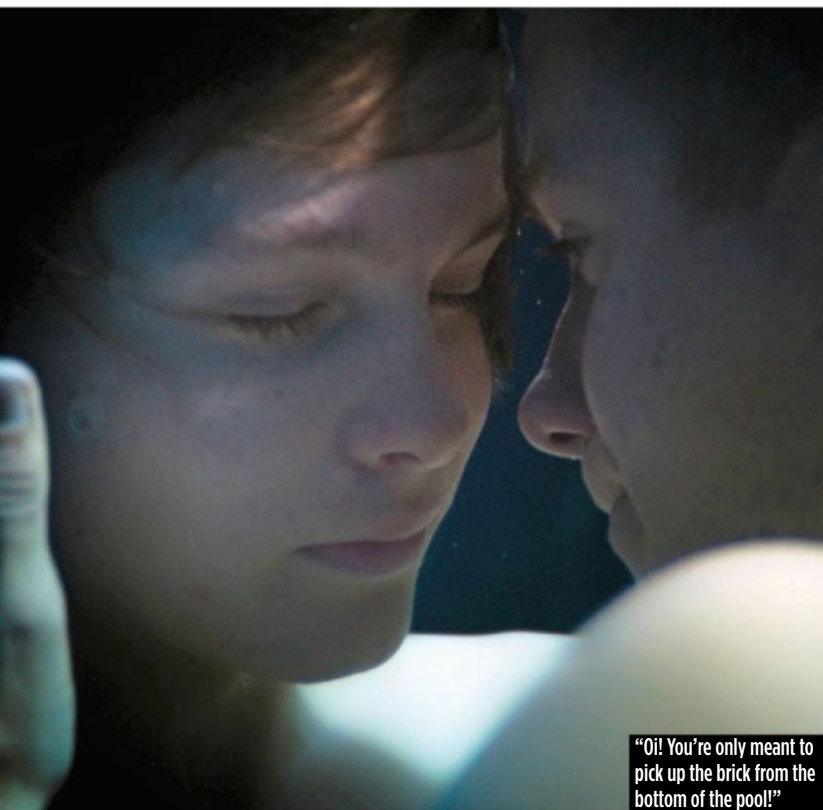
TV series can be disappointing; shows so often fail to live up to their nostalgia value. So it's a treat when a show does prove worthy of its reputation. And almost 40 years on, *The Moon Stallion* certainly does.

Sarah Sutton (later *Doctor Who*'s Nyssa) plays Diana, a blind girl drawn to the Uffington White Horse, the prehistoric chalk figure in Berkshire. Her father is investigating archaeological connections to King Arthur for Sir George Mortenhurze – but both he and stable master Todman (a young David Haig) are more concerned with a real-life white stallion, which has links to both the once and future king and the moon goddess Diana. The last time the Moon Stallion appeared Sir George's wife died, and he's after revenge...

The series is perhaps overlong, at six 25-minute episodes, but crucially it never feels slow; rather it is perfectly paced, languorously taking us on a journey through mythology and landscape, inspired by the beauty of both the country's stories and its terrain. *The Moon Stallion* is both a nostalgic treat and a genuinely entertaining fantasy.

Rhian Drinkwater

i Sarah Sutton isn't the only *Doctor Who* connection – writer Brian Hayles also created the Ice Warriors.



"Oi! You're only meant to pick up the brick from the bottom of the pool!"

GIRLS LOST

Flower power

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2015 | 15 | DVD

▶ Director Alexandra-Therese Keining

▶ Cast Wilma Holmén, Tuva Jagell, Louise Nyvall, Emrik Öhlander

❖ **Love, lust, gender identity and bullying** are all tackled by Swedish director Alexandra-Therese Keining's latest. But what could have been a heavy-handed look at a young person feeling uncomfortable in their own skin instead sidesteps most of the obvious tropes and emerges as a fanciful, emotional and resonant story of three friends and the mysterious flower that changes their relationships forever.

The trio, Kim (Tuva Jagell), Bella (Wilma Holmén) and Momo (Louise Nyvall) discover a strange bloom whose nectar switches their gender for one night per

drink. It's Kim (played in male form by Emrik Öhlander), who's spent all her life wondering if she's really meant to be someone else, who most readily embraces the newfound freedom from taunting by their schoolmates, though that begins to cause friction with the others.

Keining invests the movie with a magical realism that manages to still stay grounded, and the cast is uniformly solid. It doesn't quite keep the momentum up all the way through and has a few problems finding interesting things for the other two young women to do, but this remains a welcome, warm story that handles tricky subjects sensitively.

▶ **Extras** Just a trailer.

James White

i To find the central three boys and three girls (all of whom were non-actors), Keining screen-tested 600-700 kids.



Obesity: affects one in three.

ASTERIX: THE MANSIONS OF THE GODS

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2014 | PG | Blu-ray/DVD

❖ **This enjoyable, good-looking CG cartoon** assumes you're familiar with the French comic about heroic Gauls eternally thumping Romans.

It's a skilfully expanded version of one of the more satirical strips, where Caesar tries to culturally assimilate the Gauls. The comedy is sometimes laboured, and the voices too shouty, but this is still one of the best screen Asterixes.

▶ **Extras** None. **Andrew Osmond**



Most of all, Carla needed a haircut.

HOWLING II

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1985 | 18 | Blu-ray & DVD (dual format)

❖ **Maybe it's because** Christopher Lee's in it, but this *Howling* sequel seems to have got its werewolf and vampire mythology mixed up. Lee plays a paranormal investigator who escorts a fella to Transylvania... to put a stake through the heart of the head wolf.

It's nonsense, and not the enjoyable kind. It attempts to be funny, but despite all the werewolf orgies and exploding eyeballs, it's just a faintly embarrassing mess.

▶ **Extras** Two commentaries; interviews; behind-the-scenes footage; trailer; stills. **Sarah Dobbs**



The bar staff were a little intimidating.

MINDGAME SAGA

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1997 | PG | DVD

❖ **A Sontaran, a human and a Draconian** are kidnapped and forced to work together in micro-budget '90s *Doctor Who* spin-off *Mindgame*. With a script by Terrance Dicks and some ratty monster costumes, there's fun to be had here.

The sequel, however, is a struggle. Essentially three one-handers, it aims for profundity but ends up with Miles Richardson ranting Shakespeare through a latex mask and stick-on beard.

▶ **Extras** A retrospective; Making Of's; the scripts; a slideshow. **Will Salmon**



Skegness took its usual toll on visitors.

THE BLUE BOY

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1994 | VOD/download

▶ **BBC STORE** Although billed as a Scottish ghost story, there's really very little of the supernatural in this barely remembered BBC play starring Emma Thompson.

Primarily a relationship drama (Marie and Joe's marriage is under threat, due to Joe's affair with the unstable Beth) with light spectral trimming, *The Blue Boy* feels undercooked and lacks a killer twist. The acting, however, is blue-chip – though anyone north of Cumbria will have a hard time spotting a real Scot in the cast... **Steve O'Brien**

HOME ENTERTAINMENT

Planet Earth II uncovered yet more marvels.



THE BFG

The Tall Guy

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2016 | PG | Blu-ray 3D/Blu-ray/

DVD/download

▶ Director Steven Spielberg

▶ Cast Mark Rylance, Ruby Barnhill, Penelope Wilton, Jemaine Clement

One of Roald Dahl's most beloved books becomes an utterly charming movie in this surprisingly faithful adaptation. Some of the harder, darker edges of Dahl's tale are slightly smoothed out, but otherwise Steven Spielberg's sweet, funny film captures the essence of the book, both in terms of plot and tone.

Mark Rylance is the eponymous "gobblefunk"-speaking giant, giving a performance whose warmth and wit shine through incredibly realistic performance capture effects that blend seamlessly with the normal-sized

human beans. This is 100% the BFG Dahl created.

In fact, the film's Achilles heel is that it sticks *too* close to the source material. The story additions have varying success – a scene where the man-eating giants throw the BFG down a hill on a bin lorry feels like an action setpiece for its own sake, while a new backstory about a boy the BFG befriended many years previously feels incredibly poignant – but ultimately the story's structure works better in print than on screen, with the second act feeling saggy, and the conclusion rather rushed. Still, if you're a Dahl fan, this is a whizzpopping delight.

▶ **Extras** There's no Spielberg commentary of course. But there's nothing else either. **Richard Edwards**

i The BFG made his first appearance in a bedtime story told in Dahl's 1975 book *Danny, The Champion Of The World*.

UFO

No strings attached

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1970 | 12 | Blu-ray

▶ Creators Gerry Anderson,

Sylvia Anderson

▶ Cast Ed Bishop, George Sewell, Wanda Ventham, Gabrielle Drake

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Gerry Anderson's**

first foray into live-action television was a success, if not an unqualified one. Twenty-six episodes long, it concerned SHADO, an organisation defending Earth from alien organ harvesters, and made an effort to be something a bit different.

It's aged well enough. It still looks fab – the set and costume designers clearly had a ball, and the special effects are swish (if very model-heavy). But if only the writers had been allowed to let rip – early episodes in particular feel routine and restrained.

Later on it cuts loose a little. The imaginative "Timelash" sees SHADO commander Straker – an excellent, committed Ed Bishop – on his own while everybody else is frozen in time (and uneasily trying to stand still); "The Long Sleep" has way-out, psychedelic drug-inspired sequences; "Confetti Check A-OK" goes back to SHADO's origins, and ends up being a crisp treatise on the clash between work and relationships.

Episodes don't close with people standing round chortling – they usually finish on a sober note. Fine, but more humour in general would've been welcome. It's also a shame there's no real over-arching story or character progression over the series.

But *UFO* is a show we're glad they made. It has its place; that it could have been better still is moderately frustrating.



Ribena addiction can have terrible side effects.

▶ **Extras** If you have the DVDs should you upgrade? Maybe. Picture quality is only a little better than the (already terrific) DVDs, but you do get some new features: "From Earth To The Moon" (90 minutes), an almost *too* lengthy talking-heads examination of the show; "The Women Of UFO" (32 minutes), which interviews five of the actresses; a "SHADO briefing film" (20 minutes), mainly comprising of programme footage;

plus an incredibly comprehensive 600-page book by TV historian Andrew Pixley. Recycled from the DVD release are two Ed Bishop interviews; commentaries for two episodes; a piece on *UFO*'s fashions (hilarious); plus various bits of film material, unused footage, TV spots, image galleries, interviews and more. **Russell Lewin**

i Many props – including Straker's car – were recycled from 1969 Anderson-produced movie *Journey To The Far Side Of The Sun*.



Trainspotting's prequel surprised all.

THE ENCHANTED CASTLE

Crikey! Rum old BBC larks



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1979 | VOD/download

▶ Director Dorothea Brookings

▶ Cast Candida Beveridge, Georgia

Slowe, Simon Sheard

BBC STORE Back in the '70s and early '80s the BBC used to churn out period fantasies for children on a shoestring. While Phil Redmond was trying to introduce some *Grange Hill* grit to the afternoon Auntie Beeb still seemed much happier with children who drank ginger beer, tucked their shirts in and discovered secret passages.

Boasting all of these features, *The Enchanted Castle* is six episodes of jolly-hockey-sticks kids "gosh"-ing at the powers of a magic ring, in a castle with living statues. Based on a book by the Victorian JK Rowling, E Nesbit, it's more random than other Nesbit adaptations (*The Phoenix And The Castle*, *Five Children And It*) because the binding explanation about what's going on comes late. Until then it's all a bit meandering. Magical stuff happens, but it's difficult to reduce it all to a one-line summation.

Some hilariously dated effects and a wonderfully grumpy youngest kid make it a fun exercise in nostalgia. But today's kids might feel cheated by the cheapskate way the show creates a four-yard-tall girl – hiding her in a hedge with her head popping out. Hell, they probably felt cheated back in 1979. **Dave Golder**

i E Nesbit (Edith) was also one of the nine founding members of socialist organisation the Fabian Society.



Karl always got grouchy when Hulk lost at home.

THE INCREDIBLE HULK

Keep your shirt on...



EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1978-1982 | 12 | Blu-ray

▶ Creator Kenneth Johnson

▶ Cast Bill Bixby, Lou Ferrigno

BLU-RAY DEBUT Now that every Marvel bit-player from Fandral to Misty Knight has been brought to the screen with mint condition fidelity to their comic book counterparts, it's easy to forget that the Hulk TV show was a revolution.

With a sincere Bill Bixby as its centre of gravity, the series threw out the candy-coloured camp of *Batman*, opting instead for a grounded, earnest approach. Crucially, it took its source material seriously – all the more remarkable given its low-key morality plays were routinely interrupted by a roaring bodybuilder in green slap.

Bixby's Banner follows that oldest and noblest of American callings: the drifter, roaming the land like a gamma ray-riddled Littlest Hobo.

This box set collects the

feature-length pilot and all five original seasons (but omits the three late-'80s movies). Looking better than ever on their Blu-ray debut, these episodes are occasionally treacly but have a period fascination and nostalgic pull: just watch Lou Ferrigno race through a slushy, scuzzy '70s New York in "Terror In Times Square", undeniably preposterous (hi-def reveals his little green slip-ons) but ultimately more loveable than any CGI behemoth.

• **Extras** The bonuses from the 2008 DVD release are carried over: four episode commentaries by showrunner Kenneth Johnson (on the pilot episode, "Married" and "Prometheus" Parts 1 and 2); three rather choppy, bitty featurettes on the series (44 minutes); intros by Johnson and Ferrigno; a photo gallery for "Prometheus"; and a genuinely amusing gag reel (six minutes) that reveals a salty side to Bill Bixby. **Nick Setchfield**

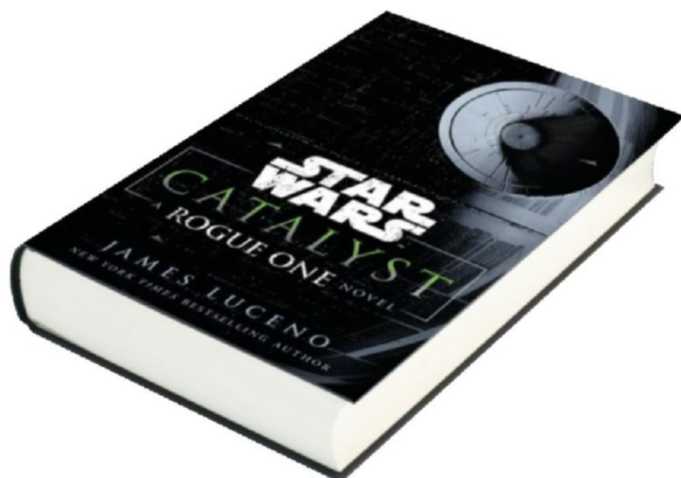
i Richard Kiel (James Bond's Jaws) was originally cast as the Hulk, but was replaced during the filming of the pilot.

(ROUND UP)



AGENT CARTER SEASON TWO (5 December, Blu-ray/DVD) isn't quite as sparky and original as its first year, but there's satisfaction to be had from the fact that a) Hayley Atwell's Peggy Carter has proved her worth to her sexist male colleagues and b) the story's moved to California, where she deals with a supergenius Hollywood femme fatale. This really shouldn't have been the show's final year, though. Back in September the forgotten *Trek* TV series debuted in HD as part of a complete 50th anniversary box set. Now you can get hold of it without buying stuff you already have again with a standalone release of

STAR TREK: THE ANIMATED SERIES (out now, Blu-ray). Hurray! The animation is crude, but the medium switch freed *Trek* from its budgetary chains and let it fly, and with voice work by the original stars (well, most of 'em) and *TOS* story editor DC Fontana at the helm, this is undeniably proper *Star Trek*. In its very best moments (like the Spock-centric "Yesteryear") we'd argue it's as good as the original series. Finally, the anime that even people with zero interest in anime need to watch is getting another run out, with a new collector's edition of 1988 classic **AKIRA** (out now, Blu-ray & DVD). Set in a future Tokyo and centring on government experiments into telekinesis, it can be confusingly cryptic, but there's no denying that it's visually stunning. This triple-play two-disc set includes both the original 1988 dub and one from 2001, and comes with a fold-out poster and a set of art cards.



STAR WARS: CATALYST

Weapons test



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**
330 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook
► Author **James Luceno**
► Publisher **Del Rey Books**

► **25 April 2014 is a date die-hard** *Star Wars* fans have good reason to remember. It marks the moment Disney destroyed the *Star Wars* Expanded Universe in one swift stroke. Declaring all previously released EU content as non-canon and rebranding it as *Star Wars Legends*, it was a genocide of much-loved characters, relegated to relative obscurity for the sake of unification. The official canon became the *Star Wars* feature films, the *Clone Wars* film/TV series and *Star Wars Rebels*, alongside all material released after the announcement. Sure, it made sense from a marketing point of view, but try telling that to someone who still listens to their *Shadows Of The Empire* soundtrack...

So, April 2014 was a dark time for the Rebellion. But Disney has been winning back even the most disappointed EU fans with every

subsequent release. They've brought old favourites back (thanks to *Rebels*, Thrawn is once again a canonical character), using books to reveal previously untold stories or provide more focus on iconic characters. Now, with *Catalyst*, they're trying something new, deepening the universe of a film that hasn't been released yet.

Excuse the extended opening crawl, but it's important to provide backstory for casual readers, because if any EU release is going to bring new fans into the *Star Wars* fiction fold, it's *Catalyst*. Make no mistake, this isn't a simple cash-in: it's 300 pages of essential backstory for *Rogue One*.

Like *Rogue One*, it has young protagonists. Unlike *Rogue One*, those protagonists don't initially include Felicity Jones's Jyn Erso, who hasn't actually been born when this story starts.

Instead, we follow Jyn's parents, Galen and Lyra Erso, as they attempt to bring a potentially universe-changing clean energy source to the galaxy. Galen Erso's scientific skills have long been

“300 pages of essential backstory for *Rogue One*”

observed by his old friend/Grand Chancellor Palpatine's ambitious Lieutenant Commander, Orson Krennic. Krennic believes Erso has much to offer a weapons project, conceived during the Republic era, which is destined to become a key element of the Empire. The problem is, Galen's a pacifist, and so Krennic's forced to use every ounce of his manipulative charisma to convince Erso to join him on his mission.

It's a simple set-up, providing deep insight. Galen Erso is fascinating; so intellectually distant he includes equations in a love letter to his imprisoned wife, yet so emotionally connected to his family that his enemies see them both as a threat to Galen's concentration and as a method via which to control him. This mixture of intelligence and naivety is a tough balance to strike, but James Luceno negotiates it masterfully; it feels like everything here will add depth to *Rogue One*'s Galen.

The same goes for Krennic, who could even be likeable if it wasn't for his mercenary attitude. Full of dry humour, known for his “legendary nocturnal carousing”, Krennic is a clear departure from previous monk-like *Star Wars* villains. Luceno cleverly uses established characters to throw Krennic into contrast – we learn much from his interactions with a cameoing Tarkin.

With *Catalyst* happening over a five-year period, we're in the room for Jyn's birth, right up until... Well, we don't want to spoil anything, but it's the perfect handover for *Rogue One*, a film we anticipate with more excitement now we've grown close to its characters. Disney may have aimed its Death Star at the previous EU, but the Force is with what's replaced it. **Sam Ashurst**

i That necklace Jyn has in the *Rogue One* trailer is most likely a kyber crystal – in *Catalyst* she tells her parents, “I want one!”



INSURGENCE

Virtual war, real issues



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**
320 pages | Hardback/ebook
► Author **Ken MacLeod**
► Publisher **Orbit**

► **What's real? It's a question** that stands at the centre of Ken MacLeod's new novel, the second volume in a trilogy (*The Corporation Wars*) that details a war fought in a far-flung solar system where robots that hitherto did what they were told have achieved sentience.

Ranged against them are troops such as Carlos the Terrorist, a dead mercenary who, when he's not fighting inside a robot body, “lives” inside a virtual world. Except Carlos and many of his colleagues aren't so sure they want to fight anymore, or whether they should even be fighting at all for the Direction, Earth's world government.

Matters are further complicated by Carlos and his cohorts each belonging to one of two conflicting factions: the Acceleration and the counter-revolutionary Reaction.

With a narrative that switches between virtual worlds and space, and between “human” characters and AIs, the shifts in perspective this all entails are often unsettling. But then that's rather the point. When so much is both in doubt and at stake, the question of what's real – for which read, what's important – is amplified, becomes urgent. A smart and satisfying SF novel from one of our most accomplished writers. **Jonathan Wright**

i The idea for the series was sparked by an early short story by Brian Aldiss, 1958's “Who Can Replace A Man?”



FIVE STORIES HIGH

Residence Evil



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

384 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Editor Jonathan Oliver

► Publisher Solaris

◉ **Few traditional horror** subgenres are quite as creepy as the haunted house tale, and Solaris's latest anthology delivers examples that explore the concept in interesting ways. Featuring well-regarded writers like Sarah Lotz, KJ Parker and Rob Shearman, *Five Stories High* comprises five novellas all themed around a central location – a creepy building called Irongrove Lodge.

These stories aren't afraid to sometimes go in traditional directions, but there's also plenty of surprises. Tade Thompson's well-crafted "Gnaw" is the closest to an old-fashioned spine-chiller, while Nina Allan's "Maggot" is a fascinating slice of literary horror, and Sarah Lotz gives us an intriguing murder mystery in "Skin Deep".

The nearest we get to a weak link is KJ Parker's "Priest Hole", which is witty and inventive but sits a little awkwardly with its fellows. The highlight is undoubtedly Rob Shearman's deeply unsettling "The Best Story I Can Manage Under The Circumstances". The linking narrative doesn't quite succeed, but as a collection *Five Stories High* is a must-read for anyone who likes their horror slow-burning, affecting and seriously creepy. **Saxon Bullock**

i Sarah Lotz's next book will be a YA adap of Mark Millar's Image comic series *Reborn*. Expect it in the autumn.



FAIR REBEL

Smash the system!



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

336 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Steph Swainston

► Publisher Gollancz

◉ **One of the recurring** criticisms of fantasy, especially epic fantasy, is that it reinforces class divisions that would better be questioned. As we see the action from the perspective of a hero who – naturally – has royal blood, he and we are sometimes witnessing the decimation of entire agrarian communities.

Granted, the best modern fantasy has started to offer the ordinary grunt's perspective, but you'd have to read a lot of fantasy to find revolutions led by non-royal/noble protagonists. Steph Swainston's new novel redresses that balance. It also grapples with ideas around inequality, prejudice and how societies cope with sudden change.

Once again, it's set in Swainston's Fourlands, a rich and detailed fantasy world the writer

“Exciting: a wildly imaginative novel”

first created when she was a child. Here, heroes are made immortal by an emperor, San. But there's a cost to living forever. Specifically, the immortals have to defend their world from rapacious insects that constantly threaten its existence.

The immortals' latest ruse is to use high explosives. In opening scenes that recall the Battle of Messines, all looks to be going well, until it turns out that not all of the gunpowder the immortals ordered has been delivered. An uprising against San is underway.

It's a conflict we see mostly through the eyes of Swainston's longtime narrator, Jant, a louché winged messenger with a fondness for narcotics. So far so familiar to longtime fans, but what's new here is the way Swainston is re-engineering her fiction, wrenching her strange world into a new technological and societal era. At times, this gives the novel a ragged quality, but that's infinitely forgivable because it's borne of ambition.

Not Swainston's best book then, but something far more exciting: a wildly imaginative novel that suggests she's a novelist about to take fantastic fiction somewhere entirely new. Bracing. **Jonathan Wright**

i In 2011, Swainston quit writing to become a chemistry teacher. "I need to return to reality," she noted at the time.



THE SECRET HISTORY OF TWIN PEAKS

Not what it seems...



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

352 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Mark Frost

► Publisher Macmillan

◉ **Billed as "a novel" on the cover**, *The Secret History Of Twin Peaks* is far less straightforward than your average TV tie-in. Comprised of a dossier assembled by a mysterious Archivist, separately analysed by an FBI agent, it's a book of newspaper clippings, photographs and documents analysing the strange events that surround the town.

For the first half there's barely a sniff of the characters we know, though previously minor player Dougie Milford becomes unexpectedly integral to *Peaks*' mythology. As the book progresses it hews closer to the show, but ends shortly after season two's finale. And while some questions do get answers (like who survived the bombing) most are clearly being kept back for the show's return in 2017.

But then this isn't about ticking off loose ends. There's something very satisfying about immersing yourself in *Peaks* co-creator Frost's heady assembly of historical fact, North American mythology, UFO-lore and occult esoterica. It's not quite the book fans were expecting, perhaps, but it is fascinating, superbly executed and beautifully presented in the hardback edition. **Will Salmon**

i There are inconsistencies, like Norma's mum having died years ago, despite her appearing in several TV episodes.

BOOKS

REISSUES

In Russian author Victor Pelevin's satire on capitalism **EMPIRE V: THE PRINCE OF HAMLET** (★★★★★, out now, Gollancz), a young man is vampirised by being given



an ancient parasite called the Tongue, and learns that civilisation is just a cattle-pen... We said: "There are

some excellent comic vignettes and fine images... but the book also reads as an extended harangue against 'sheeple', written on one long note of misanthropic smugness." Previously released in 2013 under the title **JN-T, TOTALLY TASTELESS** (★★★★★, December, Miwk Books) is a warts-and-all but fair-minded biography of John Nathan-Turner, the



producer who helmed *Doctor Who* throughout the '80s. This edition features a new cover by Target

novelisation artist Andrew Skilleter, more stills from the JN-T archive, and a bonus chapter which tackles the media storm that followed the book's revelations about sexual improprieties. We said: "The most scandalously frank book about the production of *Doctor Who* we've ever seen ... An essential read for anyone who was a card-carrying *Who* fan in the '80s." Finally, the latest entry in the SF Masterworks series of classic novels is Bernard Wolfe's weird, blackly comic 1952 satire **LIMBO** (out now, Gollancz). Set in a dystopian 1990, 18 years after a nuclear



holocaust, it revolves around a craze for pacifism which sees young men quite literally disarming by having their limbs amputated and replaced with prosthetics. Expect much discussion of philosophy and Freudian concepts, shamelessly awful puns, and some disturbing rape scenes.

A concept design for the Joker's lair.



BATMAN: A CELEBRATION

Holy coffee-table commemoration!



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

256 pages | Hardback

► Authors Bob Garcia, Joe Desris

► Publisher Titan Books

❖ *Star Trek* got all the attention, but it wasn't the only groundbreaking TV show celebrating its 50th anniversary this year: so was *Batman*.

This large-format coffee table book (full title *Batman: A Celebration Of The Classic TV Series*) meticulously leads us through every stage of production, as well as putting a spotlight on the villains and listing every exclamation of "Holy...!" A 20-page episode guide rounds things off.

With the authors having combed through production paperwork, the attention to detail is remarkable, right down to the level of flagging minor script changes. Occasionally this can get a mite excessive, mind – do we really need to know that on 12 August 1966 a crewmember stepped on a nail?

It's the illustrations that really impress. There are glorious

Adam West's lost his pants!



full-colour concept designs for various villains' lairs and traps, while an emphasis on quirky behind-the-scenes stills brings us such treats as *Batman sans pants* and utility belt, the Dynamic Duo rehearsing the "Bat-walk" in their dressing gowns, and close-ups of the snap fasteners on Adam West's back that stopped the cape flapping in his face. A detailed and appropriately colourful tribute.

Ian Berriman

i The nuclear pile in the Batcave was a recycled bit of set from the movie *Our Man Flint*, turned upside down.

BULLET TIME A BOOK IN BULLET POINTS



THE COMPLETE BOOK OF GERRY ANDERSON'S UFO

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

200 pages | Hardback

► Author Chris Bentley

► Publisher Signum Books

- A revised, expanded edition of a book first released 10 years ago.
- This edition is hardback, and crammed with images from the ITV archives – about 500 in colour!
- The chapters on pre-production and production are fascinating. Hardcore fans will also love the script extracts for deleted scenes.
- New material includes a section on Anderson film/*UFO* precursor *Journey To The Far Side Of The Sun* and details on *UFO*-inspired comics.
- Some remarks we made about the 2006 edition remain valid – the lack of critique of the episodes is a bit disappointing, and occasionally the detail can get a bit dry.
- Note: though the RRP is £29.99 Amazon is (at time of press) selling this for £6.99! Get to it!



Reviews



BONE GAP

Smalltown charm



► **RELEASED 27 DECEMBER**

400 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author **Laura Ruby**

► Publisher **Faber & Faber**

◆ **First published in the US in**

2015, *Bone Gap* comes to these shores garlanded with glowing reviews and awards galore. It's not hard to see why. We might look askance at those reviews determined to label the novel as "magic realism" – which mostly seems to be a way to say that something is both "fantasy" and "good", as if those two things are otherwise mutually exclusive – but the captivating, uplifting power of this YA tale about seeing and being seen can't be denied.

Bone Gap is a small US town much like any other. Everyone knows (or thinks they know) everyone else's business, for better and for worse. The difference is that the cornfields seem to talk and thoroughbred horses appear out of nowhere. The disappearance of a well-liked Polish student, Roza, has given the town much gossip fodder, and caused a rift between the two brothers she was staying with: troubled teenager Finn and paramedic Sean.

The truth of Roza's fate, like much of the book's fantastical elements, has a strong ring of folklore about it. But Laura Ruby blends it seamlessly into a more mundane world of hippy beekeepers, bullies with secrets, and reputations made and lost based on misunderstandings. Absorbing and rewarding. **Nic Clarke**

i The inspiration was an article about a woman who lost her son in the mall, but couldn't describe him to police.



THE FEAST OF ALL SOULS

Not a tasty prospect



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

382 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author **Simon Bestwick**

► Publisher **Solaris Books**

◆ **378 Collarmill Road is**

haunted. Actually, it's not just haunted – it's *mega*-haunted. When Alice moves in, she's initially sceptical, blaming her recent bereavement or maybe mental illness for the spectres she's seeing. But when the house repeatedly resets to the 1800s and the ghosts leave her bruised and battered, she admits defeat and calls in a priest.

There's a lot going on in this novel: hauntings aside, there's time travel, torture, grief, and even a bit of Arthurian Grail lore. The interesting stuff comes in fits and starts, though; ghost attacks are slotted between shopping trips, while the final chapters hit pause on a character's mortal peril to cram in another flashback. It's infuriating, especially because Alice is such a horrible character to spend time with. Yes, she's struggling with grief and depression, but she's so vile to everyone it's a surprise anyone's willing to help her.

The reason behind the haunting, when it's revealed, is inventively grotesque, and the various strands of nastiness weave together satisfyingly enough. Still, there probably ought to be an epilogue where Alice apologises to literally every other character in the book. **Sarah Dobbs**

i Simon Bestwick cites Tom Baker *Who* episodes and Ramsey Campbell anthologies as his horror inspirations.

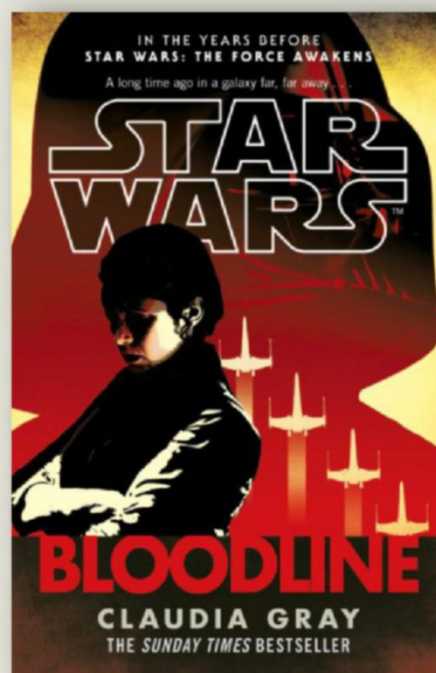
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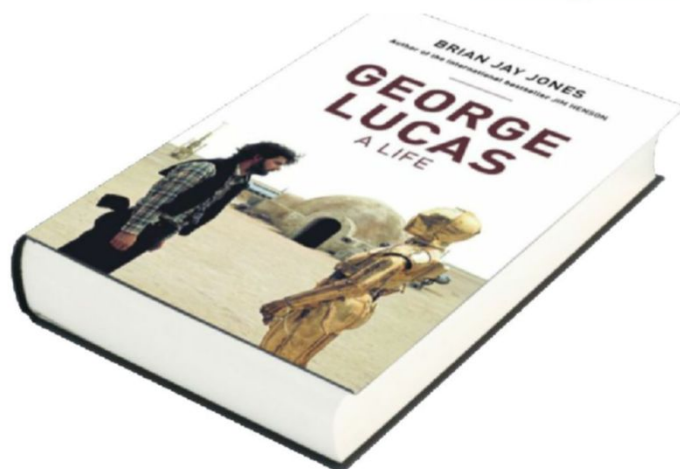
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GEORGE LUCAS: A LIFE

Curious George



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

560 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author **Brian Jay Jones**

► Publisher **Headline**

◉ **Revered as the maker of** perhaps the world's greatest modern myth and mocked as the writer of shit you can type but can't say, George Lucas is a riddle just waiting to be solved by a good biographer. And Brian Jay Jones proves equal to the challenge with this witty, insightful chronicle of Lucas's rise from smalltown dreamer to \$5 billion business mogul (and sometime filmmaker).

With limited access to the major players in Lucas's story, Jones has done a thorough job with the cuttings file, taking us deep inside every studio wrangle and backlot blow-up – of which there are many. He's a natural storyteller, too, with a great eye for colour – like the time Lucas advised a reluctant Francis Ford Coppola to take on a "little Italian gangster film" called *The Godfather* in order to pay off his debts.

Coppola and Steven Spielberg are significant supporting players – not least when Coppola takes

Lucas's pet project, *Apocalypse Now*, away from him, forcing him to turn his attention to his "*Flash Gordon* thing" instead. The book offers a wealth of detail about the *Star Wars* universe in utero, and forensic coverage of the films' strained shoots, beset by everything from Tunisian sandstorms to British union intransigence.

With Spielberg a safe pair of hands, *Indiana Jones* is more of a walk-on part, free of *Star Wars*' endless firefighting. Lucas's personal life gets even shorter shrift – though perhaps that's appropriate given that, as Jones notes of the director's messy divorce from first wife Marcia, "movies were the other woman".

What emerges is a picture of a complex, contradictory character saddened by his role in cinema's transition from artform to popcorn fodder, but who never quite gets round to making those small, personal movies he keeps promising, because he's too busy adding blinking eyes to the Ewoks.

Paul Kirkley

i As a kid, Lucas had a "floppy" ear. His dad's remedy to this situation was to fix it by taping it up!



THE PASSENGER

We all sink down here



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

384 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author **FR Tallis**

► Publisher **Picador**

◉ **The Passenger** had so much promise. It's set on a German submarine during World War II, and seen through the eyes of its commander, Kapitänleutnant Siegfried Lorenz. The crew are given the unusual mission of taking two prisoners – a British naval officer and a Norwegian scholar – back to their base for the SS to interrogate. Things go wrong, and after that nothing quite seems to go right.

This story has a lot in common with another psychological horror recently released, Michelle Paver's *Thin Air*: a similar time period, a group of men in a hostile environment (in this case the sea, in *Thin Air* the Himalayas), and constant uncertainty about whether the protagonists are facing a real, vengeful, ghost or simply suffering from the effects of prolonged physical and mental stress.

The problem with *The Passenger* is that the crew do return to base, breaking the suspense, and in their second patrol they're joined by a pro-Party photographer who's at odds with Lorenz – and this human conflict prevents tension from building up in the same way as it did in the first half of the book. There's simply not enough suspense in this thriller, and that's a huge shame. **Miriam McDonald**

i The wreck of the SM UB-65, a real-life allegedly haunted WWI submarine, lies off the coast of Padstow, Cornwall.

ALSO OUT

As ever, more books released this month than we could possibly cram in. One we'd like to flag to

Doctor Who fans is

BASED ON THE POPULAR

BBC TELEVISION SERIAL

(out now, Wonderful

Books). This detailed

guide to the Target

novelisations is **FREE,**

FREE, FREE! Author Paul

Smith is promising an

update every six months,

and asking for donations

in return. Sounds fair!

Head to <http://bit.ly>

basedonbook to

download a PDF. Speaking

of *Who*, there are also new

volumes of two ongoing

series. **RUNNING**

THROUGH CORRIDORS 2

(out now, Mad Norwegian

Press) sees TV writer

Rob Shearman and

commentary overlord

Toby Hadoke's marathon

viewing continue, as they

cover all the '70s stories.

Meanwhile, **SPACE**

HELMET FOR A COW 2

(out now, Mad Norwegian

Press) sees *SFX* scribe

Paul Kirkley's irreverent

history of the series tackle

the years 1990-2013. Sadly,

a strict embargo

prevented us from

reviewing Carrie Fisher's

THE PRINCESS DIARIST

(out now, Bantam Press),

but it sounds intriguing;

especially after revelations

about an on-set affair with

Harrison Ford. *Star Wars*

fans should also keep 'em

peeled for coffee-table

book **THE ART OF ROGUE**

ONE (16 December,

Abrams). Turning to fiction,

finally: space opera saga

The Expanse rumbles on

with book six, **BABYLON'S**

ASHES (8 December,

Orbit), while **ARCANUM**

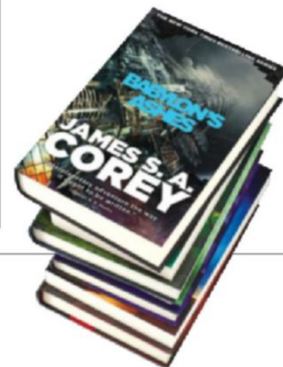
UNBOUNDED (out now,

Gollancz) collects nine

pieces of short fiction by

Brandon Sanderson (most

already published online).

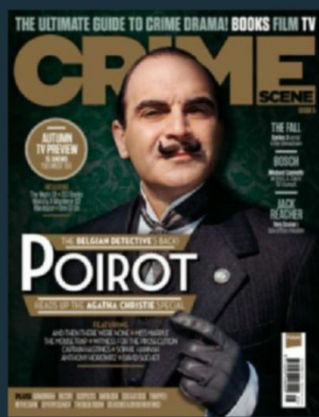


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DOOM PATROL

Goes its own Way



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher DC's Young Animal

► Writer Gerard Way

► Artist Nick Derrington

ISSUES 1-3 If there's one group of

characters who have really encapsulated the concept of "weird superheroes" over the years, it's the Doom Patrol. DC's team of damaged freaks first appeared in the '60s, but were truly defined by Grant Morrison's mind-bogglingly inventive '90s run on the title.

Since then, various revivals and reboots have failed to stick, but the latest return for the Patrol has lots more potential, as it's also part of DC's new approach to for-mature-readers comics. Its Vertigo imprint

has been struggling for some time and failing to match the creator-owned output of publishers like Image. Now there's a new DC imprint in town: Young Animal. With Gerard Way, former frontman of My Chemical Romance and now an acclaimed comics writer, acting as creative overseer, Young Animal is aiming to capture the spirit of early Vertigo comics, channelling serious weirdness with firm links to the mainstream DC universe.

Doom Patrol is the biggest of the four new Young Animal comics, and with Way also on scripting duties, it wastes no time in exploring head-expanding strangeness. Paying serious homage to the Morrison era but also forging its own path, it centres

on Casey Brinke, a lively ambulance driver/technician whose life is already pretty peculiar when she crosses paths with original Patrol members Cliff Steele (aka Robotman) and Larry Trainor. Soon she's on the run from laser-wielding aliens called the Vectra and discovering worrying truths about her past...

In these first three issues we see a series that's already wildly confident, deeply nutty and rewardingly inventive. Way's eye-opening, Morrison-influenced work on *The Umbrella Academy* showed he was an obvious fit for a *Doom Patrol* comic, and he brings a punky sense of energy as well as a warped sense of humour. He's

“Wildly confident, nutty and rewardingly inventive”

backed up by strong work from artist Nick Derrington, who pulls off a number of different art styles and imaginative page layouts while also maintaining a careful balance between cartoony surrealism and emotional reality.

If there's a downside so far, it's that certain moments are so strange and offbeat, new readers without a knowledge of Morrison's original run might find themselves baffled rather than intrigued. However, it's a delight to find a *Doom Patrol* comic that's determined to be the strangest superhero title around; so far both Way's reinvention and the Young Animal imprint as a whole are heading in a seriously promising direction. **Saxon Bullock**

i Way is also co-writing another Young Animal title, the bizarre pulp adventure *Cave Carson Has A Cybernetic Eye*.



Haven't they got lovely teeth?

THE AVENGERS: STEED AND MRS PEEL

Diana Reprints



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Big Finish

► Writer Unknown

► Artists Emilio Frejo, Juan Gonzales

COLLECTION Inspiration for a range of Big Finish audio dramas, these '60s *Avengers* strips are something of a neglected treasure.

Originally published in the pages of *Diana* – “the paper for girls that love good stories” – the eight adventures reprinted here are steeped in the kind of off-kilter Englishness that defined the TV series. From alligators in the moats of stately homes to flame-throwing scarecrows to little old ladies wielding lethal knitting needles, Avengerland's guiding principle is intact: reality is a series of trapdoors for our elegant, bantering heroes to uncover.

True, the dialogue falls short of the show's gleaming wit, the shiver of kink is understandably absent and Mrs Peel isn't quite the empowered female lead that karate-kicked pop culture's glass ceiling – she's afraid of mice for one thing. But the lush, hand-painted art – by Spain's Emilio Frejo – is truly gorgeous, mixing a rich but tasteful colour palette with masterful use of shade and some stunning likenesses. Even on TV it never looked quite this cinematic.

Raise your bowler, uncork the champers and savour.

Nick Setchfield

i This volume also contains behind-the-scenes interviews with the writers and stars of Big Finish's audio adaptations.



Hope the cat's alright.



The baggage handler soon got his P45.

MYCROFT HOLMES AND THE APOCALYPSE HANDBOOK

Sibling spying



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Titan Comics

► Writers Kareem Abdul-Jabbar,
Raymond Obstfeld

► Artist Joshua Cassara

ISSUES 1-3 **Spinning out of his** recent novel, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's take on Mycroft Holmes is as much a proto-Bond as the latest iteration of Conan Doyle's detective series.

Like 007, Mycroft proves as adept with the opposite sex as with matters of espionage. The former NBA star and his writing partner show Sherlock's brother learning his spycraft during the early days of his career as a government agent, as he's propelled headlong into a plot involving the search for missing mystic blueprints.

In the first three issues (of five), the action ranges from Cambridge to the US, with a host of famous figures thrown into the mix, including Queen Victoria and Jesse James.

Populated by monsters in vintage diving suits, Abdul-Jabbar's well-constructed steampunk world is spectacularly brought to life by Joshua Cassara's detailed, energetic artwork. With Mycroft proving equally at home in comics as in prose, it should be an elementary decision to buy this impressive series. **Stephen Jewell**

i Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's favourite portrayal of Sherlock Holmes is Jeremy Brett's TV version: "He really nailed it."



Better check out
page 108 then.

THE X-FILES: ORIGINS

Flashlight young things



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher IDW Publishing

► Writers Jody Houser, Matthew Dow
Smith

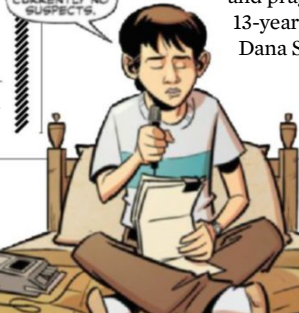
► Artists Chris Fenoglio, Corin Howell

ISSUES 1-3 **Prequels are tough,** especially when they involve a property as special as *The X-Files*. Even trickier, a large part of the show's magic came from the chemistry between its leads. Watching Fox and Scully's relationship begin, and develop, was a huge part of that show's appeal. So, how on Mars do you explain them working together as kids, for what could seem like a cheap cash-in on *Stranger Things*' success?

Simple: you keep them apart. At Martha's Vineyard, teenage Fox investigates his sister's notorious disappearance, getting his first taste of the conspiracy theories that'll dominate his adult life.

Meanwhile, grounded and pragmatic 13-year-old Dana Scully is

THERE ARE
CURRENTLY NO
SUSPECTS.



“Origins is full of subtle allusions to the original series”

in San Diego, investigating the shocking and sudden murder of her teacher.

As the series progresses, you sense the two future FBI partners could collaborate without being aware of the other's existence. It's an extremely smart premise, faithful to the source, and in the main beautifully rendered.

Origins is full of subtle allusions to the original series, whether it's hinting at Mulder's voyeuristic tendencies, or giving Scully an obsession with Captain Ahab. More impressively, the supernatural elements are dialled down, with insight into our heroes' personalities taking priority. **Sam Ashurst**

i Two *The X-Files: Origins* YA novels are due for release on 3 January – one focusing on Mulder, the other Scully.



Yes, but is it cannon?

TO THE DEATH

Rogue Troopers



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher to-the-death.com

► Writer Simon Furman

► Artist Geoff Senior

ISSUES 1-10 **Simon Furman and** Geoff Senior's latest harks back to their '90s work on Marvel UK series like *Dragon's Claws*, even featuring a fearsome mercenary who looks uncannily like robotic bounty hunter Death's Head.

Also resembling their take on 2000 AD's *The VCs*, this weekly web series centres on hard-bitten soldier Aleksy Dryagin and his motley band of crack troops. Subverting the usual future war tropes, the enemy refreshingly turns out to be not some malevolent aliens but their own bosses: the Triumvirate, a flamboyant trio of corporate schemers.

With Dryagin pining for his wife and child, Furman sometimes paints his characterisation in broad strokes. But he keeps the action amped up, with frequent spaceship battles and firefights, and supplies a few surprising plot twists.

The real draw is Senior's kinetic art, which really shines; his looser linework and vivid colours combine to evoke the true horror of interstellar battle.

More could have been made of the format to play with the conventions of the medium – this is essentially a traditional comic that's published online – but *To The Death* is also old-fashioned in the sense that it's a great read. **Stephen Jewell**

i You can download episode one for free; to read all 18 episodes as they're released you need to subscribe (£28).

CALL OF DUTY: INFINITE WARFARE

Megaton shooter gets lost in space



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PS4

► Also on XO, PC

► Publisher Activision

VIDEOGAME The biggest FPS franchise on the planet is having a bad year, partly because... well, it's left this planet behind. Reactions to *Infinite Warfare*'s largely space-based setting have been dramatic. Its debut trailer was one of the most downvoted videos in recent YouTube history, while first week sales were only half that of *Black Ops III*. In space, no one can hear Activision execs scream.

The interwebs may have overreacted in trademark style, but that's not to say their concerns aren't merited. *Infinite Warfare*'s campaign still follows the old *COD* formula of super-noisy setpiece

spectacle, but despite a more open approach to mission design and a sprinkling of spaceship dogfighting, this is largely the same game you've been playing since *Modern Warfare*, only with flabbier levels and an embarrassingly sombre tone.

But let's backtrack. The decision to blast *COD* into the stratosphere is a by-product of *Infinite Warfare*'s distant future setting. Thanks to overpopulation, the people of Earth are forced to mine the Solar System for resources, leading to the formation of off-planet colonies whose inhabitants resent those still inhabiting our spinning rock. Enter the mean old Settlement Defense Front, who open the game by bombing the hell out of a parade in Geneva, kickstarting a system-wide war.

Obviously that nonsense isn't going to stand with IW's protagonist, Nick Reyes, who goes boots-on-the-ground with the grunts for every mission. Commendably, this cheesy, space-faring backdrop leads to the most open *COD* in years – hell, maybe ever.

Combat is a weird, slightly neutered beast – balls-to-the-wall empowering one moment, totally rote the next. The biggest successes come when the game doubles down on embracing space warfare. A series of zero-g gunfights add sizzle to *COD*'s shooty steak, and just wait until Nick dons ass-kicking astronaut clobber and takes part in floating firefights.

Infinite Warfare hardly reaches for the stars. The campaign has a few fresh ideas, but ultimately feels too indebted to a waning template. Yes, multiplayer will continue to enrapture the eSports crowd, and superbly surreal '80s throwback Zombies In Spaceland is an undoubted undead treat. Let the dust settle, though, and this *Call Of Duty* enters a space race that it can't quite keep up with.

Dave Meikleham

i Formula One racer and *Call Of Duty* fan Lewis Hamilton has a small role, as a mechanic on board Reyes's warship.



UNIT: SILENCED

Not all that memorable



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

210 minutes | CD/download

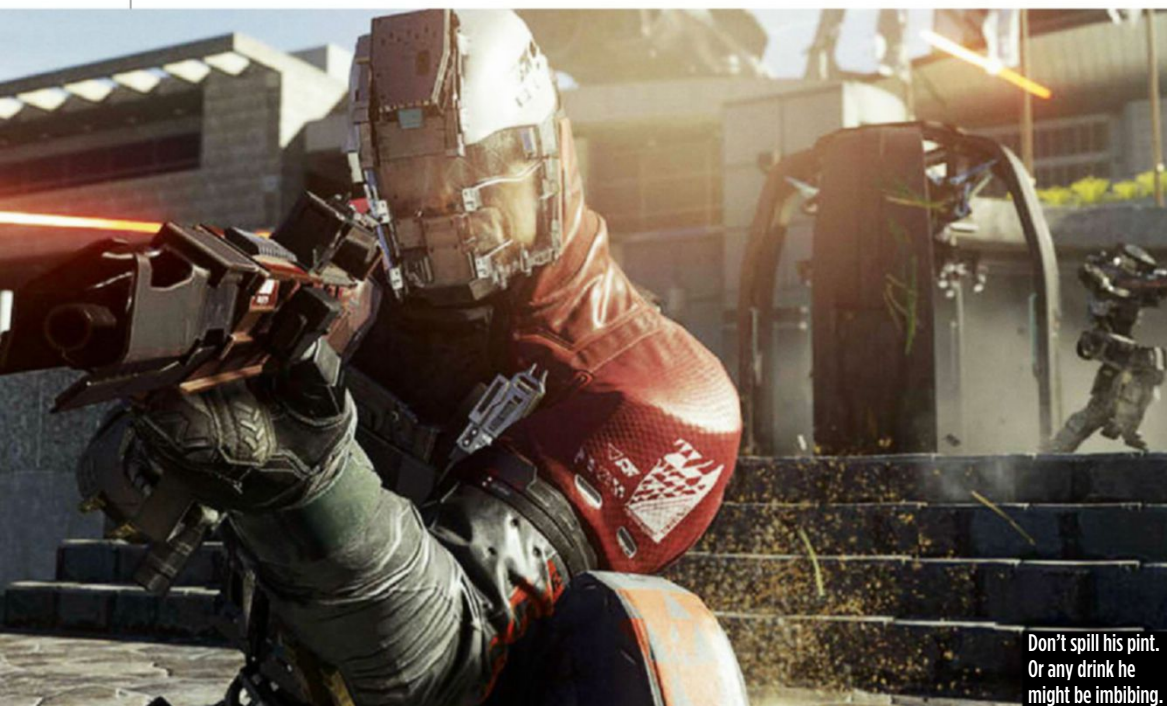
► Publisher Big Finish

AUDIO DRAMA As high-concept villains go, the memory-wiping Silents are one of the more distinctive *Doctor Who* adversaries of recent years, and they make a new appearance in the third box set of Big Finish's UNIT spin-off series.

Picking up the threads left by 2011's "The Impossible Astronaut"/"Day Of The Moon", the story pitches the UNIT team led by Kate Lethbridge-Stewart (Jemma Redgrave) and Osgood (Ingrid Oliver) against a threat they can't remember. This four-episode adventure starts quietly, with a mystery involving a rich and eccentric benefactor, but soon acquires global proportions as it becomes clear that the few surviving Silents are out for revenge against humanity.

Throwing in plenty of intrigue alongside some surprisingly resonant themes, *Silenced* is at its best when coming up with new and inventive twists on the signature powers of its main villains. However, it still doesn't feel like we're getting to know either Kate or Osgood better as characters, while the series' supporting cast remains two-dimensional. *Silenced* pulls through in the end thanks to some enjoyable setpieces and its distinctive bad guys, but these new UNIT adventures are still struggling to feel truly essential. **Saxon Bullock**

i Also out (from BBC Audio): readings of "The Space Pirates" and Third Doctor/Silurians novel *Scales Of Justice*.



Don't spill his pint.
Or any drink he
might be imbibing.

DISHONORED 2

Ditching Dunwall for chaos in Karnaca



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

Reviewed on **PS4**

► Also on **XO, PC**

► Publisher **Bethesda**

VIDEOGAME Forget *Metal Gear's* Fulton balloons, *Assassin's Creed's* concealed blades or *Saints Row's* Manapult – the Void Timepiece has 'em beat. This devilishly inventive gizmo lets you view two time periods simultaneously, flick between them, then creep up and slit enemy throats; you'll be back in the present before the corpses hit the ground. It shows Arkane's stealth sequel at its very best.

But there's more to *Dishonored 2* than a brilliant time-travelling interlude. As in the original, you can teleport, see through walls, and possess rats as master assassin Corvo Attano. There's also a major new wrinkle: you can choose to

play as his daughter, Emily. In the 15 years since the last game, Empress Kaldwin has developed into a confident, diligent leader. When Emily's throne is usurped by her aunt, you flee to neighbouring

city Karnaca, and the set-up for a revenge tale is complete.

How to reclaim your sovereignty? By stabbing bad folk in the neck with a sword, silly. Whether you play as Corvo or Emily, *Dishonored*



2 remains rooted in exceptionally violent espionage. Yet its real heart lies in its magnificently fluid movement. Be it Corvo's Blink ability or Emily's Far Reach, swiftly teleporting to ledges and lookout towers is as invigorating as it was in the original. And Karnaca – a sort of steampunk Naples – is drawn with enough lurid brush strokes to make it an intoxicating place to inhabit.

On a minute-to-minute level, *Dishonored 2* is just as empowering and joyful to control as its predecessor. The sense of familiarity is a tad deflating, though. In 2012, Corvo's adventure felt wonderfully fresh. The sequel comes across as a little safe; that time-travelling mission aside, the action never surprises as regularly as it should. All the same, this is a game oozing with ideas, a gothic adventure where your style of play is limited only by the depth of your imagination and appetite for chaos. **Dave Meikleham**

i The name of the ship Dreadful Wale is an anagram of "Farewell Daud" – a sly nod to the assassin who killed Emily's mother.

DAN DARE Volume One

Where Eagle Dared



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

180 minutes | CD/download

► Publisher **Big Finish**

► Director **Andrew Mark Sewell**

► Cast **Ed Stoppard, Geoff McGivern, Heida Reed, Michael Cochrane**

AUDIO DRAMA **Legendary '50s hero**

Dan Dare is an icon of British comics, but this latest revival of the character is exploring a brand new medium. B7 Media has teamed up with Big Finish to release full-cast adventures, and this first box set delivers three one-hour episodes of nostalgic adventure.

Set in an optimistic, '50s-esque future where Britain is exploring the outer reaches of space, they follow test pilot Colonel Dan Dare as he embarks on a series of dangerous journeys into the unknown, alongside ageing sidekick Digby and brainy

professor Jocelyn Peabody.

Loosely based on the original stories published in *Eagle*, the set kicks off with "Voyage To Venus", in which Dare confronts the villainous Mekon (Raad Rawi) for the first time. "The Red Moon Mystery" sends Dan and his friends to Mars, where mysterious creatures have wreaked havoc on a survey team, while

"Marooned On Mercury" brings them back into conflict with the Mekon as they battle slavery on the fiery planet. A bonus fourth disc presents music from this and other B7 productions.

Feeling very much in the same cliffhanging style as pulp SF sagas like *Flash Gordon*, these are pacy, action-packed adventures that

aren't afraid to throw

more modern concepts and references into Dare's world. The performances are excellent and extra depth is added to the characters, although underneath all the adaptation and reinvention, these are still



“Extra depth is added to the characters”

very simplistic Boy's Own tales of derring-do.

The production also hasn't quite succeeded in defusing the original material's awkward approach to racial politics, with the portrayal of the alien Treens and the Mekon still leading to a few uncomfortably stereotypical moments. B7 Media's take on Dan Dare isn't an all-out success, then, but despite the flaws this remains an entertaining and lively collection. **Saxon Bullock**

i Digby is played by Geoff McGivern, who also played Ford Prefect in the original *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*.



COLLECTABLES

Things Santa might stuff in your stocking

1 A long time ago a show about a time traveller in a Police Box enthralled Great Britain on a Saturday night. Funko's new **Doctor Who Pop! vinyl figures** (FPI price £9.99 each; product codes F4358, F4359) may stir memories of it. On the left: "Mr Clever", the Cybermen's attempt at getting inside the Eleventh Doctor's head in "Nightmare In

Silver"; on the right, the Tenth Doctor with his severed hand in a jar. If nothing else they'll remind you what great hair David Tennant and Matt Smith had. War Doctor, Davros and Twelfth Doctor With Guitar figures are also available.

2 This **First Order Stormtrooper Commander plush** (FPI

price £14.99; product code F4693) spits out four suitably commanding phrases when you give him a squeeze: "Move out, let's go", "We're taking you into custody", "Put down your weaponry", and the rather similar "Drop the weapon now". What, you were expecting Voltaire's "The mind is not a vessel that needs filling, but wood that needs

igniting"? Make sure your hands are clean when squeezing this hideously deformed cute 'n' quirky fella or he'll soon be as grubby as a *Rogue One* trooper.

3 A, B, X, Y... The Rebel Alliance's efforts to work their way through the entire alphabet continue with this **LEGO U-Wing Fighter** (FPI price £69.99; product code F2248). This brilliant 659-piece recreation of one of the spacefaring stars of *Rogue One* comes with retractable wings, opening cargo bay doors and an entire crew of freedom fighters. Don't waste it on the kids! Other *Rogue One* Lego goodies include Krennic's Imperial Shuttle, an AT-ST Walker and a TIE Striker.

All products are available at

forbiddenplanet
international
home shopping

www.forbiddenplanet.co.uk
01621 877 222

Reviews



4 Two more fabric figures from Funko. Both these **Fabrikations plushes** (FPI price £16.99 each; product codes F3212, F4363) combine the company's outsized-head stylings with a strokeably smooth surface (it feels a bit like suede!). We particularly like the veiny detailing on Jason Voorhees's bonce, and the *Friday The 13th* bogeyman's hard plastic mask (which can be lifted up, revealing dentistry that'd make Austin Powers wince).

5 You'd think the Bleacher Creatures range would be restricted to peroxide lovers like *Buffy's* Spike, but no. They started with sportsmen, which explains the name: in US

stadiums, "bleachers" are cheap bench seats. These **Bleacher Creature Marvel figures** (FPI price £17.99 each; product codes D6329, D6332, D6333) of Iron Man, Deadpool (in grey X-Force clobber) and Spider-Gwen are just part of a range that also includes Ms Marvel and She-Hulk. Iron Man looks grumpy, and Deadpool's got a bit of a gut. On the plus side, their flat feet mean they stand upright surprisingly well.

6 Are you a criminal headcase sprung from prison by a dodgy government agency? Then this **Suicide Squad Taskforce X courier bag** (FPI price £24.99; product code F3774) is just what you need. Boasting a

badass embroidered skull design and some seriously zippable attitude, it's the ideal repository for a bloodied baseball bat or lethal hi-tech boomerang. It also smells like crime itself.

7 The most exciting things we can say about this **Ghostbusters ECTO-1 USB memory stick** (FPI price £11.99; product code F4794) are that when you remove the cover it kinda looks like a spaceship, and that when plugged into your computer it makes for a pretty good recreation of a head-on collision. Beyond that, it's made of silicone and has 16GB of memory in the caboose... what more do you wanna know? ●

THINGS TO COME

More goodies on their way soon



FLUKEMAN BUST BANK

◆ One of *The X-Files'* most memorable monsters, season two's Flukeman lived in New Jersey's sewers. Being a radioactive mutation he is used to change, so he probably won't mind when you slot some in his back.



SPIDER-MAN TEAPOT

◆ Spider-Man, Spider-Man, does whatever a teapot can... which, admittedly, is fairly limited. We're pretty sure Peter Parker never brews up, but this bewebbed design is a delight all the same. A Captain America teapot is also in the works.



WONDER WOMAN STATUE

◆ This 12"-high porcelain statue features Gal Gadot's Princess thundering along on horseback, weapon raised. Pure Amazonian magnificence. (Drunk Geordie punching the horse in the face not pictured.)



SERIES 1

ZAPPED

Red Dwarf meets rubbish *Game Of Thrones*

▶ **UK Broadcast** Dave, finished
▶ **US Broadcast** TBC
▶ **Episodes Reviewed** 1.01-1.03

When Sky 1 took a chance on a half-hour sitcom about an ordinary human transported to a fantasy world, the result, *Yonderland*, went on to become one of the most charming, heartwarming and downright hilarious children's shows on TV. So you can understand why Dave – already home to a mountain of British comedy, including the evergreen *Red Dwarf* – decided to take a chance on another half-hour sitcom about an ordinary human

transported to a fantasy world, only this time making it for a more adult audience. The end result is *Zapped*, a mixture of every fantasy novel you've ever read, *Red Dwarf* (it even acted as a lead-in to the latest series), a dash of Terry Pratchett and the grubby look of one of *Game Of Thrones*'s slimiest back alleys.

The only trouble is, it's not actually that adult. There's the odd swear word, yes, and some innuendo, but *Yonderland* already does innuendo with a subtlety that makes the stuff on display in *Zapped* feel like you're being hit around the head with a brick. It

doesn't have *Yonderland*'s charm and inventiveness. It doesn't quite nail the morbid humour behind the kind of archetypal losers you find in *Red Dwarf*. It's witty, but not Pratchett witty. And despite some solid writing behind it (all the writers have sterling backgrounds, and Steve Coogan is also a producer), the set-ups don't really pay off as satisfyingly as they should. In short, *Zapped* has all the ingredients of a new genre comedy classic, but they're still raw and uncooked – and at only three measly episodes long, the series really could have done with some more time in the oven.

ZOOM IN



DID YOU SPOT? ▲

→ Is it our imagination, or does Steve Coogan as the fire spirit do a pretty convincing Tom Baker impression? He sounds identical...

BEST EPISODE

→ Third episode "Mr Wuffles" features an excellent guest star in the bubbly Miranda Hennessy and a puppet bird even more disturbing than Rod Hull's Emu.

TRIVIA

→ Paul Kaye appeared in *Game Of Thrones*, playing Thoros. He later said the character "invented the male topknot".

BEST LINES

→ Steg: "What would you like to drink?"
Hrothgar: "The blood of my enemies, supped from their children's skulls."
Steg: "...Mint tea?"

BEST MOMENT ▼

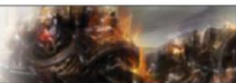
→ A drop-kick sends beloved pet Mr Wuffles into a sausage-mincer. (Note: we don't advocate animal cruelty as a norm. But throcks are clearly little gits.)



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Viewscreen

★ BEST IN SHOW ★

The characters who make TV great



KARIN PARKE

Kelly Macdonald's no-nonsense cop is *Black Mirror's* buzzy standout

► UK Broadcast Netflix, available now ► US Broadcast Netflix, now

❶ **Charlie Brooker's show** has built a reputation on prescient techno-terror and unforgettable shocks, but when it comes to characters *Black Mirror's* are generally as memorable as last Tuesday's breakfast. In part this is down to the anthology format: an hour and out, never to be seen again, typically subject to some incomprehensibly grim fate that you don't want to think about after the credits roll. All the more impressive then that Kelly Macdonald's world-weary detective from the final episode of season three, "Hated In The Nation", isn't just a joy to spend 90 minutes in the company of, it'll be a major waste if she doesn't return.

"Hated In The Nation" is a fairly conventional episode – a police procedural where Macdonald's DI Parke investigates a case of killer mechanical bees. A taciturn cop with no time for anything but the job isn't

groundbreaking, but Macdonald strikes the perfect balance between charmingly cynical and sympathetically smart – the perfect cypher for a level-headed audience dumbfounded and horrified by a tech-centric future.

With her lilting Scottish accent Macdonald spins poetry out of Parke's potty mouth, her expressive cussing one of the character's most endearing aspects. It helps that Brooker hands her all the best lines ("You haven't had the chance to get bored of reality yet"), but Macdonald makes even exposition-driven exchanges feel natural. Ultimately Parke fails, resulting in the deaths of thousands, but her fallibility and strength in the face of catastrophe makes her all the more compelling and authentic.

In more ways than one this feels like a backdoor pilot. Parke-centric spin-off show, anyone? **Jordan Farley**



"I predict fair to moderate ratings!"

However, that's not to say it isn't worth watching: far from it. Starring *The Inbetweeners'* James Buckley as Brian, a hapless office-worker zapped into another universe by a magical bracelet, it's fun seeing how he copes with finding himself in a world filled with fairies, dwarf-giants (yep, that's a thing) and men with chickens for heads. Befriending fellow losers Steg (Kenneth Collard), bartender Herman (Louis Emerick) and rubbish soothsayer Barbara (Sharon Rooney), whiny Brian sets about trying to find his way home – rather like Dorothy in *The Wizard Of Oz*, aided by three utterly useless sidekicks.

The Wizard in this scenario is Paul Kaye's Howell, a scheming magic-shop owner whose spells only work intermittently. Howell is, without a doubt, the best thing about *Zapped*: not only nabbing more than his fair share of the funny lines, but benefiting from Kaye's ramped-up performance – it's as though the actor ran around in circles for an hour before filming, so he's always out of breath and faintly twirly-eyed.

“Could have done with some more time in the oven”

There are other treats – the fairies, for instance, are like brooding Ray Winstones with wings. There's a hilarious “song”; a throwaway line about putting jam on chips; a mildly amusing B-plot about a mermaid. And the premise does have a lot of promise, even if the “fish out of water” angle has been pretty much done to death – and Brian's gormlessness could become a little annoying if the series continues.

As a whole, though, *Zapped* doesn't leave you feeling, well... zapped. It provokes more of a mild tingling sensation instead. Hardly unpleasant, but it certainly won't make your heart skip a beat.

Jayne Nelson



He's gonna need that cycle helmet...

Looks perfectly ordinary doesn't he? Well, YOU'RE WRONG!



SEASON 1

HIM

Teenage mutant's skinned-up hurdles

► **UK Broadcast** ITV, finished
► **US Broadcast** TBC
► **Episodes Reviewed** 1.01-1.03

It's hard to parse exactly what writer Paula Milne wanted to accomplish with *HIM*. A supernatural thriller about a teenage boy developing telekinetic powers? Hardly original. A drama about a teenager imploding after his parents get divorced? Done to death. And as for combining both these things – well, that's not exactly a new idea, either, as “angsty teenagers develop superpowers” has been a staple of popular culture since the Marvel comics of the '60s.

All of which means that there's nothing about *HIM* that's fresh or new; even the fact the psychic teenager's nose bleeds when he

uses his powers is familiar. Why is it always the nose, eh? How about a psychic who loses control of their bladder? (Let's face it, after all that straining it's more likely...)

So what does ITV's three-part miniseries have going for it, then, other than a hackneyed theme, a silly name and a lead character we're genuinely supposed to call “Him”? Luckily there are some fab performances: Alec Newman as the teenager's psychiatrist, for instance, or Simona Brown acting the socks off everybody around her as Him's step-sister. There's the fun of wondering what the boy's going to do next – although in the end it's an anti-climax, as his worst trick is to simply fiddle with a traffic light.

And yes, the travails of two post-divorce parents trying to get on

with their lives with a mardy, weed-smoking and secretly telekinetic teenager in the house is watchable, particularly when you find yourself confused about who to side with – everybody has a point when they tell Him off about his grumpiness, but then you can also understand where he's coming from. This, though, is let down by what is an extraordinarily undramatic ending.

What with this, and the fact that the premise is so overused, *HIM* could only really appeal to those who've never watched sci-fi, read fantasy or picked up a comic in their lives. And so that's why this aired on ITV, then, as the channel with the most mainstream audience of all. Let's hope they enjoyed what they'd been missing.

Jayne Nelson

ZOOM IN



BEST EPISODE ▲

→ Episode two unravels Him's powers until he finally uses them for evil purposes – and in the excellent final scene, his psychiatrist sees the full force of them for himself.

TRIVIA

→ Writer Paula Milne based Him on one of her own sons (“He knows, and is fine with it”) and was inspired by her own two divorces.

NITPICK

→ Him's psychiatrist offers him a brain scan and the next thing we know, he's in an MRI scanner. This is the *real* magic, as anyone who's been on an NHS waiting list for a scan can tell you...

DID YOU SPOT?

→ Simona Brown (Faith) guest-starred in two episodes of *Wizards Vs Aliens*.

CAREFUL, NOW ▼

→ Anyone who's had the sad task of spreading someone's ashes will wince to see Him simply chuck them off the end of Blackpool Pier without doing something vital first – checking the wind direction...





LINE UP

The month's most quotable dialogue



BARRY ALLEN

"I've kissed Iris West twice, and I've managed to erase both times from existence."

The Flash,
Episode 3.02

CHLOE

"He had a drug problem, right?"

LUCIFER

"Well, only if you consider ingesting millions of dollars' worth of cocaine a problem. I call it a Tuesday."

Lucifer,
Episode 2.05



SUPERMAN

"See, now... if the bullets don't work, right, why the punching? I just never understood that."

Supergirl,
Episode 2.02



HECTOR

"You sound like a man who's grown tired of wearing his guts on the inside."

Westworld,
Episode 1.04



MICHAEL

"Well, here's the situation. I kind of kicked your dog into the sun."

The Good Place,
Episode 1.01



SCRIPT EASE

A TV season distilled

SEASON 3

THE STRAIN

Forget the vampires, the real monster is a little boy...



► UK Broadcast W, finished
► US Broadcast FX, finished
► Episodes Reviewed 3.01-3.10

After season three goes off with a literal bang, Ephraim Goodweather's son Zach talks through his issues with a friendly psychiatrist.

PSYCHIATRIST
So Zach, what would possess a little boy like you to detonate an atomic bomb in New York?

ZACH
My dad killed my mom.

PSYCHIATRIST
Okay, that must have been traumatic. But most kids would just skip school, or take drugs, possibly arson... Besides, didn't your dad have his reasons?

ZACH
Yeah, he's a dork.

PSYCHIATRIST
Not quite what I was getting at...

ZACH
And a supervillain.

PSYCHIATRIST
Erm...?

ZACH
He was! In *Ant-Man*.

PSYCHIATRIST
I think you're getting confused...

ZACH
Then how come he shaved his head for *Ant-Man* and then never grew it back?

PSYCHIATRIST
But was your mum not a vampire with a prehensile tongue at the time of her death?

ZACH
Yeah, she was coooowellll. She gave me a blind baby vampire as a pet.

PSYCHIATRIST
And your mother killed people, sucked their blood and wore a really bad wig?

ZACH
Hell yeah. All dad's mates did was fight vampires in dark tunnels week after week. Boring. And dad just tinkered with some device that was supposed to block the vampires communicating FOR WEEKS. Boring. That's when he wasn't boffing the second most intelligent woman on the show 'cause the most intelligent woman on the show got killed off last season. BORING.

PSYCHIATRIST
Your dad did have a hybrid human/vampire on his team – a Mr Quinlan? Did you not like him?

ZACH
Yeah he was kinda cool, but Dad's force field of boredom even got to him eventually.

PSYCHIATRIST
I'm still not quite understanding how you went from child of a divorce to mass killer.

ZACH
I DON'T KNOW! IT'S NOT FAIR!

PSYCHIATRIST
Are you just inherently genetically loathsome?

ZACH
I HATE EVERYONE!

PSYCHIATRIST
What about Mr Eichhorst, the ex-Nazi vampire and his master, the, um [flicks through notes]... Master?

ZACH
I DON'T KNOW! I DON'T CARE! But they do smell funny. And it was totally rad when the Master took over the body of that guy with the big nostrils to trick dad. Shame he didn't KILL HIM!

PSYCHIATRIST
Okay, I've heard all I need to hear. I'm not sure how Mr Negan is going to take the news that he's not the most loathsome character on TV.

Dave Golder

SPURIOUS AWARDS

Celebrating the silliest and strangest moments from the month in TV



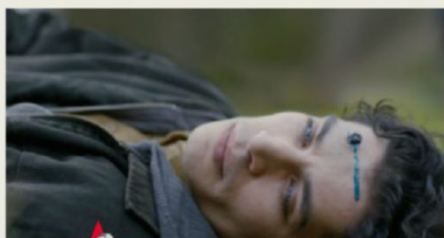
ODDEST HOBBY OF THE MONTH

What the hell was Julian Albert doing in his office in *The Flash*? Recreating crime scenes in a fish bowl? Well, if it keeps him busy...



REALITY SHOW STAR OF THE MONTH

In *Gotham*, Bruce Wayne auditions to be the new Mary Berry for when *The Great British Bake Off* makes its debut on Channel 4.



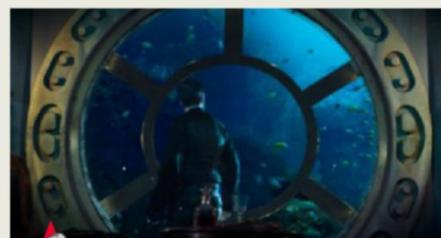
VISUAL PUN OF THE MONTH

A Synth in *Humans* wants to be called Radiator. Then he gets shot. So... "bleeding the radiator"?



ROTTEN RESEARCH OF THE MONTH

The Legends of Tomorrow meet King Arthur in *Tintangle*? How'd they like it if the Doctor went to the Gettysburg Address?



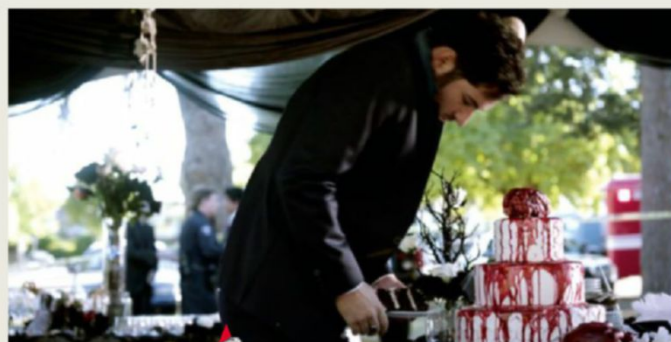
WET WHERE'S WALLY OF THE MONTH

With *Once Upon A Time* being a Disney show you can't help wondering there's a possibility of Finding Nemo here...



REMAKE OF THE MONTH

Looks like the Americans have cast Cat in yet another US remake of *Red Dwarf*. Or is it just a shot from *Westworld*?



DELICACY OF THE MONTH

Forget *Game Of Thrones*. Here's a real red wedding with brain food served at the undead-themed reception in *Lucifer*.



RECYCLING OF THE MONTH

The BBC makes use of old Castle Grayskull play set in *Class*.



UNEXPECTED GUEST STAR OF THE MONTH

Stretch Armstrong is back in *Legends Of Tomorrow*.



DELETED SCENE OF THE MONTH

Mexico's bid to host the Olympics goes wrong in *The Strain*.

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THE EVENTS OF 2016

How much have you been paying attention to the last 12 months?

Quizmaster Richard Edwards, Editor

QUESTION 1

How was Adam Wingard's *Blair Witch* known before they told us what it really was?

QUESTION 2

Which series of movie adapts of a YA book series will conclude on TV after the third movie flopped?

QUESTION 3

What was the name of the "other world" the creature in *Stranger Things* called home?

QUESTION 4 PICTURE QUESTION

Which vast, space-set game is this?

QUESTION 5

Which two authors teamed up for a follow-up to Arthur C Clarke's *A Meeting With Medusa*?

QUESTION 6

Which of these characters was *not* in the line-up awaiting Negan's bat in *The Walking Dead*? Rick, Carl, Morgan, Rosita, Aaron or Maggie?

QUESTION 7

In which horror film did Ralph "Finchy" Ineson star alongside a goat named Black Phillip?

QUESTION 8 PICTURE QUESTION

Name the character played by Brianna Hildebrand in *Deadpool*.

QUESTION 9

What was the topical subtitle of the third *Purge* movie?

QUESTION 10

Who wrote the original *Miss Peregrine* novel?



QUESTION 4



QUESTION 8



QUESTION 11



QUESTION 19

QUESTION 11 PICTURE QUESTION

In what 2016 film did Daniel Radcliffe play a corpse?

QUESTION 12

Which horror film, released in August in the UK, was based on a dialogue-free, sub-three-minute short film by David Sandberg and Lotta Losten?

QUESTION 13

Which famous Marvel character has been reinvented this year with Riri Williams assuming a very famous mantle?

QUESTION 14

Which author won this year's Arthur C Clarke Award with *Children Of Time*?

QUESTION 15

Iconic Batman tale *The Killing Joke* was turned into an animated movie this year. Who provided the original art?

QUESTION 16

Kenny Baker sadly passed away in August. Which Ewok did he play in *Return Of The Jedi*?

QUESTION 17

Name the mutated warthog and rhinoceros heavies who made their big-screen debuts in *TMNT: Out Of The Shadows*.

QUESTION 18

Who wrote the screenplay for the movie adaptation of his own novel, *The Girl With All The Gifts*?

QUESTION 19 PICTURE QUESTION

Name the TV show from the poster.

QUESTION 20

This year *Game Of Thrones* the TV show overtook George RR Martin's novels. What's the title of his upcoming sixth *A Song Of Ice And Fire* novel?

Answers
1 The Woods 2 Divergent 3 The Upside Down 4 No Man's Sky 5 Stephen Baxter and Alastair Reynolds 6 Morgan 7 The Witch Negasonic Teenage Warhead 9 Election Year 10 Ransom Riggs 11 Swiss Army Man 12 Lights Out 13 Iron Man 14 Adrian Tchaikovsky 15 Brian Bolland 16 Paploo 17 Bebop and Rocksteady 18 Mike (Mr) Carey 19 Westworld 20 The Winds Of Winter

How did you do?

Sporting achievements in 2016



→ 0-5
England's exit from Euro 2016



→ 6-10
Europe just miss out on Ryder Cup



→ 11-15
Cambridge win the Boat Race



→ 16-19
Team GB's record-breaking Olympics



→ 20
Leicester win Premier League

Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi



THE MOOMINS

Jayne Nelson, Freelance Writer

The Moomins are to Finland and Sweden what Mickey Mouse is to the USA, or Totoro is to Japan. Even if you've never read Tove Jansson's wonderful books, chances are that you'll recognise at least one of the characters from the bizarre, Polish-Austrian made "Fuzzy Felt" puppet series that aired in the UK in the '80s, or from the merchandising machine that's been really taking off over the last few years. You might even have passed the Moomin Store in London, or spotted them in a kawaii shop that mainly sells Japanese anime goodies. And now I've pointed this out to you, you'll see them *everywhere*.

Created by Finnish (but Swedish-speaking) artist Tove Jansson in the '40s, the characters first appeared in *The Moomins And The Great Flood*, which then spawned eight more novels of varying levels of strangeness as well as comic strips, television series and films.

Enough of their background: what the hell are Moomins, anyway?

Led by the loveably pompous, top hat-wearing Moominpappa, the hippo-esque creatures live in the dazzlingly beautiful Moominvalley – we know it's dazzlingly beautiful because of Jansson's illustrations, which are surreal pen-and-ink delights. Moominmamma is the family's



handbag-clutching heart and soul; Moomintroll is the excitable yet moral son. There are friends and foes aplenty, from the Hattifatteners – weird swarming creatures who attract lightning – to my personal favourite, the lonely Groke, who wanders the land leaving ice everywhere she goes. And the Moomins have fabulous adventures, from setting off to colonise an unknown island to riding around on clouds to dodging a devastating comet, meeting all sorts of silly, scary or philosophical creatures on the way.

Why do I love the Moomins? Because they're kind. They meet everything thrown at them without even raising an eyebrow, be it tiny dragons, haughty seahorses or fussy Fillyjonk neighbours. Jansson's cleverly simplistic prose parodies everything from family life to social etiquette. And there's so much richness in their world that I've always wanted to visit them. Sitting in the Moomins' warm little house, drinking tea and chatting with Moominpappa while Moomintroll rides by on a pink cloud – well, that pretty much sounds like heaven. ●

Jayne proudly sports a tattoo of Moominland Midwinter's Squirrel With The Marvellous Tail.

Fact Attack!

→ The first Moomin TV series was made in Germany in 1959 with marionettes. There are many Japanese adaptations, too; see them on YouTube.

→ The first Moomin movie was 1992's *Comet In Moominland*, a prequel to the Moomin TV series and a Dutch/Japanese co-production.

→ There is a Moomin World theme park in Naantali, Finland – and next year a Moomin World will also open in Lake Miyazawa in Japan.

→ There will be an exhibition of Tove Jansson's lesser-known artworks at the Dulwich Picture Gallery from 25 October 2017.

SEE YOU
NEXT MONTH!
4 JAN
DETAILS ON
PAGE 39



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TV

THE MOST IMPORTANT SHOWS OF ALL TIME



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- 18 THE X-FILES
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- 22 BATTLESTAR GALACTICA
- 24 THE WALKING DEAD
- 26 GAME OF THRONES

CONTRIBUTORS

RICHARD EDWARDS,
JORDAN FARLEY, DAVE GOLDER,
JOSEPH McCABE, JAYNE NELSON,
STEVE O'BRIEN, WILL SALMON,
DAVID WEST

DESIGN

MIKE BRENNAN,
JONATHAN COATES

PRODUCTION

RHIAN DRINKWATER,
RUSSELL LEWIN

THE MOST IMPORTANT SHOWS OF ALL TIME



It's often said we're living in a golden age of TV, where the quality of home entertainment rivals – and often surpasses – what we see on the big screen.

This special magazine tells the story of 15 essential sci-fi and fantasy shows that paved the way for our current glorious era of box sets and streaming.

It's important to point out that we're not saying the series here are the *best* – though many of the shows would make any list of greatest hits. These are the series that were the most groundbreaking, had the biggest cultural impact, or simply did something with such style and originality that the world had to take notice.

Spanning over 60 years, the shows here take in a huge variety of styles and genres, from the primary-coloured superhero fun of '60s *Batman* to the brutal zombie grit of *The Walking Dead*; the vintage cerebral drama of *Quatermass* to the deep space laughs of *Red Dwarf*; the strings-attached action of *Thunderbirds* to the whip-smart, female-led genius of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*.

There may be shows you think we've ignored – *Babylon 5* misses the cut because *Battlestar Galactica* arguably lifted the serialised space opera to a new level and won mainstream plaudits – but we believe these are the series that best define genre on the small screen. If these shows didn't exist, *SFX* might not be here either.

Happy viewing!

Rich

Richard Edwards, Editor
@RichDEdwards

QUATERMASS

The dawn of TV science-fiction

THE PITCH

Professor Bernard Quatermass of the British Rocket Group confronts – four times! – sinister alien forces that threaten to destroy humanity. He has an odd aversion to keeping the same face two stories in a row.

WHY IT'S ESSENTIAL

Nigel Kneale probably wouldn't have been happy seeing his name in a science fiction magazine. Despite his godfather role to a raft of SF writers, he was haughtily dismissive of most drama that sat under the sci-fi umbrella. Nevertheless, his greatest creation – Professor Bernard Quatermass of the British Rocket Group – brought grown-up SF to British TV screens at a time when the genre, outside of middlebrow literature, was at its most embarrassingly infantile.

Quatermass is not only one of the most important sci-fi series of all time, it's a landmark series in the history of television itself. TV drama in 1953 was barely past its potty training when Nigel Kneale, then only 31, was asked to cook up a serial to fill a six-week gap in the BBC's Saturday night schedule. Back then there wasn't a tremendous amount of original TV drama, most of the BBC's output being stiff adaptations of stage

plays or novels, all from the established canon of What Was Good For People. *The Quatermass Experiment* was ecstatically different. It was ambitious, it was intelligent, it was powerfully disturbing and it was unashamedly science fiction. Of course, 1953 was a pre-ITV age, meaning the BBC (this is 11 years before it became BBC One) had a captive audience. Outside of the coronation (screened only a month previously), *The Quatermass Experiment* was one of the very first event television moments, scooping up audiences of around four million, which – given the scarcity of television sets in 1953 – amounts now to success of *Live 8* proportions.

Two years later, *Quatermass II* arrived. In what would become a norm of the series, Quatermass was given a new face. The professor was now played by John Robinson (*The Quatermass Experiment*'s Reginald Tate having died of a heart attack only two weeks before recording), who reluctantly took up the role. By now ITV was up and sprinting and *Quatermass* was deemed a sure ratings clobberer for the corporation. In just two years, the number of TV sets in British homes had doubled and *Quatermass II* netted an average of 8.5 million viewers, enough to see ITV off and establish the Professor as one of



1953's *The Quatermass Experiment*.

The Facts

Creator
→ Nigel Kneale
Aired
→ 1953–59, 1979
Number of seasons
→ 4
Number of episodes
→ 22

Auntie's most valued critical and commercial assets.

Quatermass's crowning achievement came with the third serial, *Quatermass And The Pit*, which arrived (with another new Quatermass, this time the definitive André Morell) in 1958. The production values had been amped up, and the story – which had an ancient Martian spaceship uncovered deep beneath Knightsbridge – was Kneale's most beguiling marriage of superstition and science.

Despite its sprinting success, Kneale had no desire to keep *Quatermass* alive after *The Pit*. "I didn't want to go on repeating because Professor Quatermass had already saved the world from ultimate destruction three times, and that seemed to me to be quite enough," he said later.



Spaceships under London in *Quatermass And The Pit*.

IMAGE © BFI COLLECTION(2)



“It was ambitious, intelligent and powerfully disturbing”

Still, never say never again, as the song goes, and in 1973 Kneale penned what he thought would be the definitive final chapter of the *Quatermass* story for the BBC. Amazingly, for a corporation that had cherished *Quatermass* as their own, they bailed on a fourth story, with ITV taking on the mantle in 1979. A more ambitious and balls-out SF tale than even *Quatermass And The Pit*, the fourth

story (now with Sir John Mills as Quatermass, the fourth actor in as many stories), the simply titled *Quatermass* both benefited from and was handicapped by the surge in budget. A grim, dystopian parable, the four-part serial finally killed off the professor, sacrificing himself to save the Earth.

Kneale's *Quatermass* serials are milestone works in the history of popular television drama, and used science fiction to reflect back the headlines of the day, whether it be American militarisation of Britain (*Quatermass II*), race riots (*Quatermass And The Pit*) or environmentalism (*Quatermass*). And though he may have been antagonistic to the genre as a whole, Nigel Kneale is one of our more cherished SF scribes. Though he's probably turning in his grave hearing that. **Steve O'Brien**



THE LEGACY

Quatermass's legacy runs deep in not only British sci-fi, but also American (John Carpenter litters his movies with references to the show – see *The Thing*, above). Jon Pertwee's era of *Doctor Who* was heavily influenced by the *Quatermass* serials – so much so that script editor Terrance Dicks approached Kneale to write for the newly Earth-bound series. Kneale, who despised *Doctor Who*, turned him down – and years later, the professor was name-checked in 1988's “Remembrance Of The Daleks”. The BBC remounted *The Quatermass Experiment* in 2005, as a live BBC Four production, casting Jason Flemyng as a newly buff Bernard Quatermass.

THE TWILIGHT ZONE

A journey into a wondrous land of imagination

THE PITCH

An all-purpose, anything-goes anthology series, suitable for telling tales of science fiction, fantasy or horror, and often employing twist endings.

WHY IT'S ESSENTIAL

In many ways, sci-fi TV can be divided into programmes created before *The Twilight Zone* and those created after. Though Rod Serling didn't invent the types of stories that his show came to be known for, he was the first writer/producer to present them in a way that would resonate with a wide audience: lyrical, passionate and – in the best sense of the phrase – of their time. For the late '50s and early '60s was the beginning of a sea change in Western pop culture, as the world had at long last begun recovering from World War Two and was coming to terms with its socioeconomic aftershock. Serling, a war veteran and former boxer, came from the hard-knock school

of TV writing, honing his craft writing acclaimed teleplays like *Requiem For A Heavyweight*. His most beloved creation came at exactly the right moment, when conformity still dominated an American generation yearning for the next stage in its maturity.

Week after week, the dry, sharply suited host smuggled concepts and perspectives into US homes that had long been the exclusive domain of print fiction. Part pitchman, part moralist, part diplomat, Serling introduced literacy and a preoccupation with the human condition to SF TV.

The mastermind was inspired in equal parts by the radio dramas of Norman Corwin and the short stories of Ray Bradbury. Though Serling would eventually write a staggering 92 of *The Twilight Zone's* 156 episodes, his writing staff would consist of three master fantasists from the Bradbury school of thought: Richard Matheson, Charles Beaumont and George Clayton Johnson. From their typewriters came irony-laden

The Facts

Creator

→ Rod Serling

Aired

→ 1959-1964

Number of seasons

→ 5

Number of episodes

→ 156

fables like "Time Enough At Last", about a henpecked bookworm who survives a nuclear apocalypse; "The Invaders", about an isolated farm woman who must defeat a miniature but deadly space invasion; and "Nightmare At 20,000 Feet" (starring a young William Shatner), about a paranoid aeroplane passenger convinced there's a gremlin on the wing of his plane.

Serling and his team frequently fused their imaginations to hot-button social issues as well, crafting tales that examined racism at the height of the civil rights movement (years before *Star Trek* would present its diverse crew of explorers), as well as blacklisting in the wake of McCarthyism, and Cold War paranoia during the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Of *The Twilight Zone's* five seasons, all but one (the fourth), consisted of half-hour episodes, the perfect format in which to pack the short, sharp shock of the new that helped transform a cultural landscape. **Joseph McCabe**



THE LEGACY

If any show's influence can be called incalculable, it's *The Twilight Zone*. In its wake came almost every other literate genre TV show, including *Star Trek* and *The Prisoner* as well as many other noteworthy anthology series, from *The Outer Limits* to *Night Gallery* (Serling's follow-up) and *Tales From The Crypt* (above). It also inspired the 1983 film from directors John Landis, Steven Spielberg, Joe Dante and George Miller; along with two TV revivals – in 1985 and 2002. The more successful '80s revival employed legendary scribes Harlan Ellison and George RR Martin as creative consultant and story editor.

REX



Steed rescues Mrs Peel from a faintly humiliating demise.

“Revelled in a stylised, fantasy vision of England”

gritty than glam. It wasn't until the series was given a makeover at the beginning of its fourth series that it found its playful, Daliesque groove. From the urban espionage antics of the first years, the show now began to reinvent itself as a fantasy show. From trilby-rocking robots to mind-transferring machines to man-eating plants, *The Avengers* revelled in a stylised, fantasy vision of England, where picturesque villages hid criminal masterminds and London was as colourful and nouveau as if it had been painted by Peter Blake.

Steed may not have shared the sheets with any of his ladies, but *The Avengers* was always a show about sex. Innuendo and fetishisation had been part of *The Avengers*' DNA since the Cathy Gale days and the show delighted in binding and gagging its leading ladies, all the while wearing their foxy leather catsuits. And no episode encapsulates the series' kinky heart as much as “A Touch Of Brimstone”, where Emma Peel is gussied up in a skimpy corset with a spiked collar and high-heel boots to become the Queen of Sin.

The Avengers offered us a fantasy Britain, but it was also one that celebrated sex and subversion, eccentricity and wit. Nothing has ever looked like it, before or since. It bowed out on 21 May 1969 with Steed and Tara King being blasted into the air in a kit-built rocket. *The Avengers*, and the 1960s, were over. Saving Britain would never be so stylish again. **Steve O'Brien**

THE AVENGERS

Saving the world in style

THE PITCH

A man with a penchant for bowler hats, umbrellas and tailor-made suits investigates strange goings-on with the help of a succession of glamorous lady sidekicks.

WHY IT'S ESSENTIAL

In case you were wondering, ITV got there first. The name “the Avengers” may now be more synonymous with Stan Lee's ragtag troop of superheroes, but back in the 1960s *The Avengers* meant something very different to British television viewers.

The Avengers TV series debuted on 7 January 1961 (two and a half years before the first issue of Marvel Comics' *The Avengers*) and signed off in May 1969, and in many ways it defines the decade as much as The Beatles, LSD or Twiggy bopping about in a glitter dress. It was the touching point between the heritage-rich England of the past, represented by Patrick Macnee's

bowler-hatted John Steed, and the new England, epitomised by a string of trailblazing leading ladies, from Honor Blackman's Cathy Gale to Diana Rigg's Emma Peel to Linda Thorson's Tara King.

The Avengers was a very different beast in those creaky early years to the stylishly arch spy-fi show it would become. Originally intended as a vehicle for the grim-faced Ian Hendry, it co-starred Patrick Macnee as the shadowy John Steed and was more

The Facts

Creator
→ Sydney Newman
Aired
→ 1961-1969
Number of seasons
→ 6
Number of episodes
→ 161

THE LEGACY

John Steed returned to TV in 1976, this time partnered by Joanna Lumley and Gareth Hunt, in *The New Avengers*. Lasting for two series, it moved away from the camp of the show's latter years, preferring more realistic adventures for a now fifty-something Steed. A movie version arrived in 1998, starring Ralph Fiennes and Uma Thurman, but was a box office and critical bomb. Though no show ever managed to replicate its unique style, there are echoes of *The Avengers* in *Adam Adamant Lives!* and *Virtual Murder*, as well as 2015's *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (right).





DOCTOR WHO

Adventures in space and time

THE PITCH

A grumpy old man turns into a tramp, Worzel Gummidge, a walking scarf, Tristan Farnon, a multicoloured fool, Radagast the Brown, I, Christopher Eccleston, a Scottish man pretending to be Cockney, that dude with the face and Malcolm Tucker. Messes about in time and space. Originally intended to last one season in 1963. Still going strong.

WHY IT'S ESSENTIAL

Honestly, has there ever been a television show quite like *Doctor Who*? Gerard Garrett, of former tabloid newspaper *The Daily Sketch*, famously described it as

“the children’s own programme which adults adore”. A perfect summation, but it’s so much more than that...

Fans often talk about the flexibility of the programme’s format. And while that’s only sort of true – can you imagine a *Doctor Who* episode that doesn’t feature either monsters, peril or running down corridors? – it’s the only show in the world that can skip so easily between settings and genres, while telling stories about life, death, love, monstrous invasions and morality. It can be both deathly serious and utterly ridiculous – often in the same episode.

The Facts

Creators

→ Sydney Newman, CE Webber, Donald Wilson

Aired

→ 1963-present (let’s forget about that big gap from 1989-2005)

Number of seasons

→ 35 (not counting the specials in 2009 and 2013)

Number of episodes

→ 826 (to date)

When the show first started, it was designed to live up to the BBC’s Reithian ideals. Like the Corporation itself, it would “inform, educate and entertain”. Historical stories with no monsters or time paradoxes rubbed shoulders with trips to alien civilisations and bat’s arse weirdness like “The Web Planet”.

That mandate shifted over time, with the historical stories soon being shelved. Instead, Patrick Troughton’s era focused more on the monsters. Then, with Jon Pertwee’s appointment as the Doctor, it changed again, becoming a contemporary military adventure series. This ability to adapt to changing circumstances and cultural tastes is key to *Doctor Who*’s survival, and also to its appeal. And it’s something that continues to this day. The twisty-turny (we’re avoiding that other phrase...) plotting that characterises the Steven Moffat era is very different to the (literally) down-to-Earth Christopher Eccleston year. And if you don’t





The Tenth Doctor and Rose: the most popular Doctor/companion combination ever?

like the series as it is now, fear not – in a couple of years' time it will be entirely different again.

At the heart of the show's enduring popularity is the Doctor himself – one of the greatest fictional characters of all time. An alien traveller with no name from a mysterious planet, he's all things to all people. At different times throughout the show he's a pacifist, a warrior, a hero, an anarchist, the most dangerous man in the universe, a fool (in all senses), a father, a grandfather and your cheeky best pal. He eschews violence (except for the times when he doesn't – "Vengeance On Varos", we're looking at you) and tries not to get too involved in the affairs of others (except for every bloody week!). He's both a blank slate that incoming writers can leave their mark on, and also a character with a rich, detailed history. There really is no one else like him on TV.

Then there's the wonderful universe that he inhabits – a universe, let's not forget, that has



Different incarnations unite for 20th anniversary special "The Five Doctors".

been improvised by hundreds of different people, running a creative relay race since 1963. There's a vast, bewildering mythology to *Doctor Who* now – from Gallifrey and the Time Lords to the never-ending parade of monsters. Most television shows manage, at best, one iconic baddie in their lifetime – *Doctor*

In fact, that's probably the most unique thing about this show: it's a true mainstream success. *Doctor Who* isn't like *Stargate*, *Battlestar Galactica* or *Lost*. All fine shows, sure, but none of them have been taken to the heart of a nation in the way that *Doctor Who* has. Even *Star Trek* – the closest equivalent in

“He eschews violence – except for when he doesn't”

Who has at least five: the legendary Daleks, the Cybermen, the Master, Davros and the Weeping Angels. Then there's the menagerie of memorable second-tier baddies: the reptile-like Silurians, the dome-headed Sontarans and the scaly-skinned Ice Warriors...

Crucially, though, that mythology only exists as much or as little as the current showrunner wants it to. It's very rare that you need to know anything about *Doctor Who* before watching the latest episode.

terms of longevity and popularity – never had the same mass appeal. *Doctor Who* is as much family light entertainment as a genre piece. People who wouldn't normally go near anything featuring spaceships and aliens adore it. And even if you've never actually seen an episode, if you grew up in the UK between 1963 and 1989, or 2005 and now, you'll know what the TARDIS is, or what a Dalek looks like. It's not just our show now. It's the nation's. **Will Salmon**

THE LEGACY

Star Trek is said to have inspired a generation of scientists and astronauts; *Doctor Who* had the same effect on creatives. The current production team aside (almost all of whom are fans), writers like JK Rowling, Robert Rankin and Grant Morrison have clearly been influenced by it. Artist Mark Wallinger created a sculpture of a dematerialising TARDIS, and Orbital finish gigs with their remix of Delia Derbyshire's groundbreaking theme. There's also a crop of directors – Middle-earth's Peter Jackson (right), *Harry Potter*'s David Yates and *Drive*'s Nicolas Winding Refn – who have expressed an interest in working on the show.





THUNDERBIRDS

TV with strings attached

THE PITCH

From their secret island base, the philanthropic Tracy family runs International Rescue to serve and protect the citizens of the world. Aided by socialite Lady Penelope and her trusty butler Parker, International Rescue's five Thunderbird vehicles take them from the depths of the ocean to the edge of space. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 – Thunderbirds are GO!

WHY IT'S ESSENTIAL

Debuting in 1965, *Thunderbirds* was the high water mark in the career of Gerry Anderson, the creator of the Supermarionation school of

puppetry. Anderson originally wanted to work in live-action filmmaking, but in 1957 found himself directing the children's puppet show *The Adventures Of Twizzle* for British television. Frustrated in his desire to work with humans on big-budget features, Anderson realised his love for spectacle and action on the small screen with puppets, first with *Supercar*, then *Fireball XL5* and *Stingray* before he hit the bullseye with *Thunderbirds*. The show had a huge budget for the time – where *Doctor Who* was made for roughly £2,500 an episode, a typical instalment of *Thunderbirds* cost £40,000 and Anderson made sure every penny

The Facts

Creators

→ Gerry Anderson, Sylvia Anderson

Aired

→ 1965-1966

Number of seasons

→ 2

Number of episodes

→ 32

ended up on the screen. The design work was superb, while the special effects were groundbreaking and far beyond anything any contemporary series could attempt.

Anderson and his team were masters at creating epics with their miniature sets, particularly whenever it was time to make those sets explode in cataclysmic fashion. Those ingredients alone would have made the series remarkable but the cast of characters provided the icing on the cake. The five almost hilariously accomplished Tracy brothers (multiple degrees, Olympic medals, etc) who pilot the Thunderbird craft were all cut from the same square-jawed hero cloth, but then there was the engineering genius Brains to appeal to more cerebrally inclined fans. The glamorous Lady Penelope gave young girls a heroine to identify with, while the interplay between the posh Penelope and her cockney butler Parker provided the banter and frisson. Penelope was not as dynamic and independent as *The Avengers'* Emma Peel, but she represented a quantum leap in gender equality compared to the hapless women of Anderson's earlier works.

Unfortunately, the commercial failure of film *Thunderbirds Are Go!* in 1966 hastened the end of the TV series. Anderson made two more classics using Supermarionation, *Captain Scarlet And The Mysterons* and *Joe 90*, but neither matched the enduring popularity of *Thunderbirds*. **David West**

THE LEGACY

Anderson did go on to fulfil his dreams of working with actual humans, beginning with 1969's *Doppelgänger*. Attempts to resurrect *Thunderbirds* have been a mixed bag – the 2004 movie flopped magnificently, though the current ITV CG reboot is lots of fun – but nothing can dull the shine of the original, not even Trey Parker and Matt Stone parodying the Supermarionation format in their comedy *Team America: World Police* (right). *Thunderbirds* proved that Anderson and British TV could deliver spectacle to rival Hollywood, just scaled down to puppet size.



BATMAN

POW! BLAP! ZOK! Superheroes conquer TV

THE PITCH

KAPOW! Holy television smash, *Batman*! A plucky duo who fight crime are brought to Technicolor life on telly screens across the land, making wry, tongue-in-cheek observations about morality as they do so. The Caped Crusader himself, Batman – aka millionaire playboy Bruce Wayne – and his boyish sidekick, Robin (Wayne's ward, Dick Grayson) fight a gallery of villains including the Joker, Catwoman and the Riddler, and must thwart their villainy at every turn. Tune in next week for more news of our intrepid heroes: same Bat-time, same Bat-channel!

WHY IT'S ESSENTIAL

If you ever find yourself in a situation where you're trying to explain to someone what "camp" means, we'd suggest you point them towards this adorable series, pat them on the rear and say "Shoo!" *Batman* is so extraordinarily camp

it's hard to believe it features the same characters as Christopher Nolan's now legendary cinematic version. If Christian Bale's Batman is a tortured, dark, brooding soul, Adam West's is a jolly PE teacher who gives lectures on being nice to your fellow man but somehow manages to make it seem cool. And that's not an easy thing to pull off, as any schoolkid will tell you.

Ostensibly aimed at a younger audience itself, *Batman* actually crossed demographics with its witty, pun-tastic scripts, inventive villainy and enthusiastic voiceovers. Its 120 episodes, which ran from 1966-68 (a charming film was also released in 1966), spanned the rise of The Beatles and flower power, latching on to some of the psychedelia and grooviness of the era without scaring the establishment in the process. Yet it also aired as the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement mired the US in protests. Its contemporary, *Star Trek*, used these real-life politics to create

The Facts

Creators

→ Bob Kane, Bill Finger (characters), Lorenzo Semple Jr, William Dozier

Aired

→ 1966-1968

Number of seasons

→ 3

Number of episodes

→ 120

poignant morality tales, but *Batman* presented an escape from all of that – a simplistic worldview filled with cartoon villains you could boo and hiss, while Batman solemnly told the kids watching to drink their milk. For a while, it worked, but sadly – as the '60s drew to a close – audiences began to grow more sophisticated and the show was cancelled.

But look what it gave us. Spectacular fight scenes in which action words from the comics were flashed up on screen ("Boff!" "Crash!"). The catchiest TV theme until *Wonder Woman* came along in the next decade (you're humming it now, aren't you?). Villains who were even more fun to watch than the two leads (we'd argue that the Riddler has never been bettered on screen – Frank Gorshin was a force of nature). The sheer, unabashed energy of it all. And, oh yes, *that* Batmobile.

Dark or light, has *Batman* ever been more iconic than this? We think not. **Jayne Nelson**



Gotham: cold enough to need gloves, but warm enough for tights.



THE LEGACY

Introducing generations of non-comics-reading kids to *Batman* is a fairly huge feat. There haven't been many shows since that have dared to capture the show's uniqueness, however, although we'd argue that short-lived geek-out *The Middleman* gave it a fair shot in 2008. And the series certainly influenced many of the *Batman* animated series that followed it, most notably *Batman: The Brave And The Bold* (2008-2011). Starting in 2013 a 30-issue comic series, *Batman '66*, also told stories in the style of the show. But its biggest legacy is without a doubt current series *Gotham* (above) – dark and brooding, yes, but there's an undercurrent of *Batman*'s anarchy that you just can't mistake, particularly with its villains.

STAR TREK

Exploring strange new worlds

THE PITCH

The show that boldly went where no one had gone before – into space to teach alien women about a thing we humans call... love. And if the alien males didn't like it, they learnt the hard way that the Prime Directive wasn't going to stop Kirk kicking their ass.

WHY IT'S ESSENTIAL

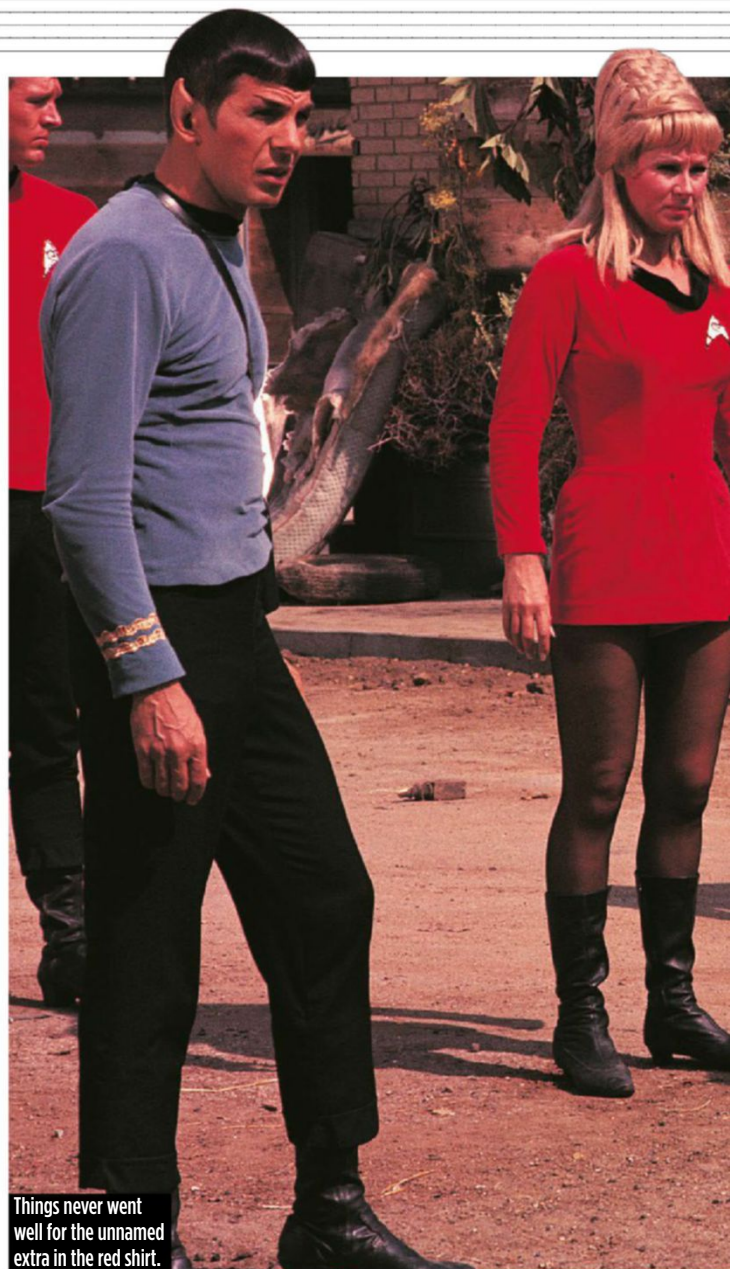
The original *Star Trek* only lasted for three seasons – and was almost cancelled after the second – but it enjoys a profile in the public imagination that other sci-fi shows can only regard with green-eyed envy. The show's catchphrases remain part of our modern vocabulary 50 years after the series first aired. It had action, computers you could talk to, strange alien races, cool technology and female crewmembers in really short skirts and go-go boots. In 1966, the future looked awesome.

The show had pretensions of profundity, exploring the nature of good and evil, the existence of parallel universes and much more. The writers on the series pushed at the limits of the genre by creating storylines that brought in elements from outside science fiction. There were '20s mobsters in "A Piece Of The Action", a World War 2 adventure in "Pattern

Of Force" and even swords and sandals in the gladiatorial escapade "Bread And Circuses".

A large part of *Trek's* appeal lay in its cast, particularly the central trinity of Kirk, McCoy and Spock. The charismatic William Shatner brought humour, passion and boundless self-confidence to the captain of the USS Enterprise. Kirk was not averse to swapping knuckle sandwiches with the bad guys, he had a proclivity for taking his shirt off and the ladies never knew what hit them. He had two foils in Leonard Nimoy's wry, detached Mr Spock and DeForest Kelley's perpetually bad-tempered Doctor McCoy. Later incarnations of *Star Trek* never managed to create a character as thoroughly irascible as McCoy, who brought considerable frisson to every conversation with his inflexible morality and sharp tongue. Spock, an icon of science fiction in his own right, was the brains of the operation – rational, analytical and cool under pressure. McCoy was the conscience and Kirk the heart. And they had that elusive, sought-after quality that all TV casting directors dream of: chemistry.

The supporting cast asserted their own personalities until Scotty (James Doohan), Chekov (Walter Koenig), Uhura (Nichelle Nichols) and Sulu (George Takei) were as vital to the identity of the



Things never went well for the unnamed extra in the red shirt.

The Facts

Creator
→ Gene Roddenberry
Aired
→ 1966-1969
Number of seasons
→ 3
Number of episodes
→ 79

show as the three leads. Much praise has been heaped on *Star Trek* for its vision of racial integration and the show was a pioneer in giving prominent roles to non-white and non-American characters. (Compare the casts of its predominantly white contemporaries *Lost In Space* and *The Time Tunnel*.) Kirk's crew was ethnically diverse and while the format has been repeated in every subsequent *Trek* incarnation with varying degrees of success, none of the spin-offs existed in a context as charged as that of '60s America. The Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, just two years before the series began, but that was not the end of the struggle – Martin Luther King would be shot dead in 1968. Against this backdrop of social upheaval, *Star Trek* featured a



"Klingons on the starboard bow!"



“Writers on the series pushed at the limits of the genre”

racially integrated crew all working in an atmosphere of respect and cooperation. True, the three principal stars were all white men and not every episode is a glorious ode to equality – witness the terrible stereotyping of Native Americans in “The Paradise Syndrome” with white actors in make-up and wigs. However, factors like that have to be balanced

against everything the show did right. Sulu provided a positive portrayal of an Asian character, while having a Russian character, Chekov, on the bridge of the Enterprise during the Cold War suggested that in the future mankind could put aside its differences. However, what stands out most of all is the scene in “Plato’s Stepchildren” when Kirk kisses Uhura. In 2016, that’s no longer such a big deal (although still a remarkably rare occurrence on US television) but the sight of a white man passionately kissing a black woman in the US in 1969 was daring and taboo-smashing. This was in an era when some US states still segregated the use of water fountains. Kirk and Uhura really were boldly going where no one had gone before. **David West**



THE LEGACY

Gene Roddenberry’s creation has become a sci-fi institution with blockbuster movies, spin-off TV shows (above), novels and mountains of merchandise – JJ Abrams’s rebooted blockbuster movie series has broken *Trek* box office records, while a brand new spin-off TV series, *Star Trek: Discovery*, reaches Earth in May 2017. But the show’s influence extends far beyond the realm of popular culture. NASA asked Nichelle Nichols to help them recruit more women and ethnic minorities for the space shuttle programme, while George Takei is a high profile activist for gay rights. When James Doohan passed away, his ashes were sent into space onboard the Falcon 9 rocket. Rivalled only by *Star Wars*, *Trek* remains the sci-fi franchise against which all others are measured. Live long and prosper, indeed.

THE PRISONER

I am not a number!

THE PITCH

Bloke off *Danger Man* (possibly) resigns and wakes up in a nice village somewhere in Wales (possibly), except he's now called Number Six. Lots of different men ask him why he resigned, but grumpychops won't tell them.

WHY IT'S ESSENTIAL

As a revolutionary icon, Patrick McGoochan possessed few of the qualifying credentials. At 39, this well-tailored Catholic, whose fame had been fuelled by his lead role in the defining crime drama of the time, *Danger Man*, was hardly a natural bed-chum of the counterculture's more primary-coloured flame-throwers. So when McGoochan approached ATV supremo Lew Grade suggesting a follow-up series to *Danger Man*, the cigar-rattling mogul had no reason to believe he was being sold something so wonderfully wonky and so dizzyingly original that it would become as emblematic of counterculture chic as *Sgt Pepper*, a Mary Quant miniskirt or Dylan going electric.

A furiously-stirred stew of Orwellian prophecy, Swiftian satire, Kafkaesque nightmare and a Bonzo Dog Band sense of the absurd, *The Prisoner* caught the spirit of the time in a way few other TV dramas managed. This was McGoochan reaching out to the radicals with a flower in one hand and a machine gun in the other.

Even if the elliptical storytelling proved a headthrob, *The Prisoner's* lush production values made the series a virtual spa for the eyes. Portmeirion was a location prepackaged for the colour television age, and the show's crisp 35mm photography made *The Prisoner* look struttily cinematic. Just think how much less attractive the series would be had it been made seven or eight years later on 16mm, all flickering grain and washed out colours.

Only 17 episodes of *The Prisoner* were ever produced. McGoochan later admitted that the concept was only able to sustain seven episodes, but Lew Grade planned to sell the series to CBS in the States so asked for 26. McGoochan compromised,

The Facts

Creators

→ Patrick McGoochan, George Markstein

Aired

→ 1967-1968

Number of seasons

→ 1

Number of episodes

→ 17

following up the first block of 13 episodes with a further batch, and the promise of the final episode.

When the moment came to reveal the big man behind the Village, it wasn't some Blofeld-type mastermind that was behind Number Six's kidnapping. But then anyone who thought that the resolution would be that logical simply wasn't paying attention. When unmasked, Number One turned out to be Number Six himself. And not even Six looks surprised as he sees his own face leering back at him.

So, who was Number Six? McGoochan's production company, Everyman – formed to make *The Prisoner* – may provide a clue. Everyman was a symbolic figure in medieval morality plays, a character with no name or past, simply there to tell a story. Number Six may well represent everyone and no one, a blank cypher to symbolise the anti-establishment heart of humanity. But clear-cut answers is what *The Prisoner* is so adept at avoiding. Discovering its truth takes all the fun away. **Steve O'Brien**



"Why did you resign? WHY DID YOU RESIGN?" Just don't expect an answer...



THE LEGACY

The Prisoner's legacy took a long while to trickle down; the alternately perplexed and outraged reaction to McGoochan's cheese-dream of a series caused a move away from the studied weirdness of *The Prisoner*. Early this century, though, its influence started to be felt, with JJ Abrams citing it as a prime influence on *Lost* (above), and AMC birthing their own disappointing remake in 2009. It's also been referenced in *The Simpsons* (where McGoochan reprised his role as Number Six), *2Point4 Children* (where Ben is kidnapped and wakes up in Portmeirion) and as a special episode of '80s music show *The Tube*.

REX



A robot, a cat, a hologram and a really slobby space technician, third class.

“Both enormously funny and great science fiction”

Red Dwarf is not an exercise in lampoonery. Sure, there are some “pop culture” gags in it, but they’re more likely to be at the expense of football, soap stars or religion than sci-fi. When it comes to SF, *Red Dwarf* is surprisingly hardcore. It’s dealt with concepts of parallel universes, VR environments, AI self-determination, mutant diseases and time paradoxes. Maybe because it makes those concepts funny, people don’t realise what a hot bed of sci-fi innovation the show can be. “Back To Reality” (the one where they awake from a gaming experience believing their past few years on *Red Dwarf* to have been a VR fantasy) and “Krysis” (in which they make a phone call to the universe and find it having a mid-life crisis) are both enormously funny and great science fiction.

Through it all, a cast that gelled magnificently has held everything together, even though the choices were hardly conventional. Co-creator Rob Grant once recalled, “We wanted real actors and we ended up with a dancer, a comedian and a stand-up poet.” Somehow Danny John-Jules (Cat), Chris Barrie (Rimmer) and Craig Charles (Lister) combined with alchemical results. Once Robert Llewellyn was added as Kryten, science fiction had its own Fab Four, even if only one could play guitar. Badly. **Dave Golder**

RED DWARF

It’s cold outside...

THE PITCH

Having been accidentally left in stasis for three million years, scouser slacker Dave Lister awakes on the mining ship *Red Dwarf* to discover he’s the last human in the universe. Not to worry. The ship’s AI computer, Holly, resurrects chicken soup vending machine technician Arnold J Rimmer to keep him company. What Holly neglected to check was whether slobbish Lister and the officious Rimmer actually got on. Which they don’t. Meanwhile Lister’s pet cat has evolved into a new species and they pick up a servile service droid called Kryten along the way.

WHY IT’S ESSENTIAL

There are simple reasons why *Red Dwarf* is great: it’s funny, it’s damned good sci-fi and it boasts four brilliant characters at its core.

A lot of sci-fi comedies tend to be sci-fi parodies. Even the greatest

comedy sci-fi movie of all time – *Galaxy Quest* – is more a comedy about the tropes of sci-fi and sci-fi fandom (albeit a very affectionate one). Same with *Paul, Spaceballs* and *Fanboys*. But the BBC is responsible for the two best comedies that aren’t about sci-fi because they are sci-fi: *The Hitchhiker’s Guide To The Galaxy* and *Red Dwarf*.

The Facts

Creators

→ Doug Naylor, Rob Grant

Aired

→ 1988-present

Number of seasons

→ XI (to date)

Number of episodes

→ LXVII (67) (to date)

THE LEGACY

With space-set comedies remaining thin on the ground (the Beeb had another crack with *Hyperdrive*, right, from 2006-07), *Red Dwarf*’s greatest legacy is the way no one in Britain can see a Smeg fridge any more without sniggering. Yes, *Red Dwarf* managed to get its (not so) made up favourite swear word into common usage, though considering the inspiration it really feels like it should have been a swear word anyway. Within more hardcore SF circles, “Better Than Life” (a pre-*Matrix* version of VR), Silicon Heaven, the despair squid and Mr Flibble are just some of the concepts that can be dropped into discussion without further explanation.



TWIN PEAKS

Nobody mention
the stag.



TWIN PEAKS

A place both wonderful and strange

THE PITCH

An eccentric FBI agent investigates a supernatural murder mystery in the logging town of Twin Peaks, where the only things finer than the peculiar denizens are the coffee and cherry pie.

WHY IT'S ESSENTIAL

The owls are not what they seem in *Twin Peaks*, a show so odd that at one stage it fooled almost 30 million Americans into entering the dark and twisted imagination of cinema's most subversive surrealist, David Lynch.

Co-created with Mark Frost, *Twin Peaks* marked the moment that weird became acceptably mainstream. To say it was like nothing on television at the time is selling it short; nothing has come close ever since.

And it wasn't the product of focus groups or board meeting brainstormers. For the first eight episodes at least, Lynch and Frost created their masterful police-investigation-show-meets-schlocky-soap-opera without interference, or expectation of an appreciative audience. Like some mad, endearing fever dream its outlandish imagery, off-kilter dialogue and bizarre twists and turns seared themselves into the psyche of unsuspecting viewers, and became instantly iconic in the process.

The delicious mystery – who killed Laura Palmer? – was the

hook. But by their own admission Frost and Lynch considered it a McGuffin. The real, beating heart of the show was the oddball set of characters. From Dale Cooper's zen Sherlock to Killer BOB's maniacal body-hopping murderer, each had a story to tell about silent drape runners, how that gum you like is going to come back in style, or possessed logs. Unique and brilliant.

Also unique, and brilliant, was Angelo Badalamenti's breathtakingly timeless score. Famously, Badalamenti and Lynch composed the main "love" theme in 20 minutes on a Fender Rhodes keyboard, and rarely have creatives been so in tune with the needs of their show. The music established a mood that was so evocative mere notes are still enough to transport you to a familiar time and place.

Despite network ABC playing timeslot musical chairs with the first season it quickly became a bona fide cultural phenomenon, the very definition of a water cooler show. At the end of its first year *Twin Peaks* was nominated for 14 Emmys (winning two) and won the Golden Globe for Best TV Series. It was equal parts scary, funny, weird and sexy; but after the first season it all started to go a little wrong.

There's still a huge amount to admire in season two, but it's undeniable that the show lost a significant reason to tune in after Leland, under the control of murderous demonic entity Killer BOB, was revealed as



The Facts

Creators

→ David Lynch, Mark Frost

Aired

→ 1990-1991, 2017

Number of seasons

→ 2 (a third will air in 2017)

Number of episodes

→ 30 (to date)

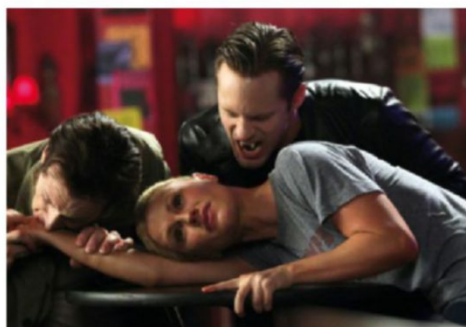
Laura's murderer. The episode remains one of the show's most powerful moments, but also its biggest mistake.

After, *Twin Peaks* fever petered out. The show was moved to Saturdays at 10pm, which prevented water cooler chatter; coverage of the Gulf War dominated; ratings plummeted to well under 10 million, from an average of 12-13; and the storylines reflected this reduced interest. The introduction of Windom Earle, an ex-partner of Coop's with a deadly grudge, saw a brief creative flurry during the show's final few weeks, before a series finale that ensured its place in TV history. Lynch returned to direct for the first time in 15 episodes, while Frost co-scripted the cliffhanger-loaded send-off. It's likely the pair knew they might never get the opportunity to tie up the loose ends, which makes their brass-balled decision to go all-out screwy all the braver.

A few years later Lynch would direct a big-screen prequel, *Fire Walk With Me*, but it's a testament to their integrity, and belief in an open-ended, tragic finale, that it deliberately dodged answering any questions, instead presenting a horrifying portrait of Laura's final days. The film wasn't well received and as a result *Twin Peaks'* ferocious flame was extinguished – at least until 2017, when a third season will finally air. They say the light that burns twice as bright burns half as long – in this case, nothing could be truer. **Jordan Farley**

THE LEGACY

It's no exaggeration to say *Twin Peaks* changed American TV forever. Though still shot in 4:3, gone were the questionable production values that plagued pre-*Peaks* productions, in their place cinematography as accomplished as anything Lynch committed to celluloid and narrative tomfoolery that opened the floodgates to the past two decades of pioneering TV. *Lost*, *American Horror Story* and *True Blood* (right) wouldn't exist without it, neither would videogames such as *Silent Hill* and *Max Payne*. A damn fine legacy.





THE X-FILES

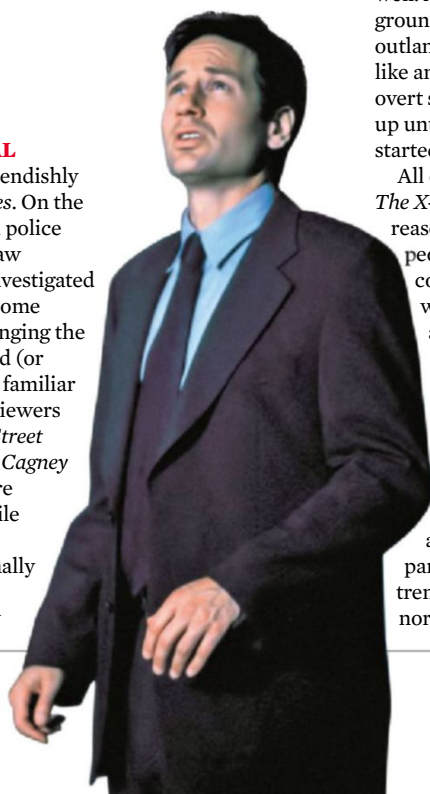
The truth is in here

THE PITCH

Two mismatched FBI agents who may or may not have feelings for each other set out to debunk/prove the theory that things that go bump in the night really exist. The audience is in on the joke: we know that aliens, werewolves and stretchy serial killers really are out there, but every week sceptic Agent Scully explains them away like so much rubbish. Elsewhere, an epic Alien Invasion Subplot gets so confusing that not even a mysterious Cigarette-Smoking Man could explain it all, not that he's likely to do that anyway. The truth is out there. Somewhere.

WHY IT'S ESSENTIAL

There was something fiendishly sneaky about *The X-Files*. On the outside, it was a normal police procedural show: two law enforcement officials investigated a crime (usually a gruesome murder) each week, bringing the perp to justice at the end (or not). In that way, it was familiar to the vast majority of viewers raised on a diet of *Hill Street Blues*, *Law & Order* and *Cagney & Lacey*. Both leads were attractive, although while David Duchovny's Fox Mulder was conventionally handsome, Gillian Anderson's Dana Scully



was a rare example of a woman written to show off more than just her looks – her brains counted as well. And the series seemed grounded in reality, despite its outlandish elements; it was shot like any other cop show, with no overt silliness or surrealism (well, up until writer Darin Morgan started having fun, anyway).

All of this combined to make *The X-Files* a hit for one huge reason: it was the sci-fi show people who didn't think it was cool to watch sci-fi could watch. Outlandish spaceships and Starfleet uniforms too much for you to handle? How about an FBI basement and a couple of business-suited agents? Without even realising it, people were sucked into its deceptively "ordinary" world and soon all things supernatural, paranormal and alien were so trendy they almost became normal. You didn't have to

A classic pose, but murder on the thighs.



The Facts

Creator
→ Chris Carter
Aired
→ 1993-2002, 2016
Number of seasons
→ 10
Number of episodes
→ 208

those conversations at the water cooler in your office the next day?

Most of all, however, there was the sense that *The X-Files* was smart. It wasn't trying to appeal to the lowest common denominator: it was aiming for the highest. Its ongoing plot arc – about the kidnapping of Mulder's sister and

ended up on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, or parodied in *The Simpsons*? Even the theme music hit the number two spot in the UK charts!

The X-Files had something most shows can only dream of: coolness. Sure, as time went on and Duchovny eased back his involvement, a certain *je ne sais quoi* was lost.

“It became the show to boast about watching”

a conspiracy involving a shadowy secret organisation – required some serious brainpower to follow, particularly as the show moved into its later seasons. Viewers were never talked down to; they were expected to be as on the ball as Agents Mulder and Scully. And because of this intelligence, it became the show to boast about watching – far from it being a silly, guilty pleasure, you could be out, loud and proud as an X-Phile. Would the stars have otherwise

Later seasons featuring Robert Patrick and Annabeth Gish retained their quality but lost their charm. By the end of the original run it can be argued that the show outlived its own coolness, the two big-screen outings were disappointing and 2016's *X-Revival* was something of a mixed bag. But hey, that doesn't matter. What matters is that while it was on top form, *The X-Files* was the show that made sci-fi so mainstream it became normal. Trust this one. **Jayne Nelson**

“believe”, as the show so gleefully urged us to, but you could certainly have fun believing by association.

As for us, the geeks... well, it almost goes without saying that we loved it. Based loosely on the concept of an old '70s show named *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*, *The X-Files* gleefully rolled out all the horror movie monsters we've ever loved while also creating monsters so disgusting they've become icons in their own right. The show's copious amounts of blood, pus and gore were a first for primetime – these were the days before *CSI* autopsies were everyday events, remember – and its message, that you shouldn't trust the government and that cover-ups existed from the top down, was deliciously enticing. Ingenious scriptwriting (check out “Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose” or “All Souls”) and compelling villains (check out “The Host” or “Squeeze”) made this a show you'd be foolish to miss – how else could you join in with

THE LEGACY

Where do we start? *The X-Files* had a ton of fun bringing horror to our screens and inspired shows such as *Millennium*, *Fringe* (right) and *Supernatural*, plus all sorts of alien-esque gubbins including *First Wave*, *The 4400* and *Dark Skies*. Spin-off *The Lone Gunmen* may not have lasted long but they'll never be forgotten, while stars Duchovny and Anderson are still going strong in their respective careers – Anderson proving particularly versatile with roles on both sides of the Atlantic. And after the 2016 miniseries, an eleventh season is still a possibility.



BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER

If the apocalypse comes, beep us

THE PITCH

A tiny blonde cheerleader confounds sexist expectations by actually being a secret Chosen One: a kick-ass warrior with super-strength born to rid the world of nasty evil creatures, particularly vampires. She promptly falls in love with one (and then two!) of said vampires while saving the world a lot with the help of her awesome friends.

WHY IT'S ESSENTIAL

There was nothing quite like *Buffy* on TV (or at the cinema) before it debuted in 1997. A strange hybrid of *Clueless* and *The X-Files*, it knew exactly what it wanted to do and did it without stopping to wonder if it should. *Buffy* wanted to make heroes of teenage outcasts; to show that high school (and later, college) was a daily battle to survive; and to prove that women could hold their own in a world filled with men and, oh yes, monsters. (Sometimes the men were worse than the monsters, but hey, that's dating for you.)

Just check out that title, for starters. At no point could anybody have sat down to watch this show without realising it had a sense of humour. Right from the start this show was cheerfully self-aware and willing to poke a little fun at itself... but it had a lot more fun poking fun at everything else.

Every horror movie cliché was turned on its head, from the opening scenes featuring a seemingly innocent schoolgirl who was revealed to be a bloodsucking monster – almost a cliché itself these days, but *Buffy* made it mainstream – to the evil demon Mayor obsessed with good manners and cleanliness. Joss Whedon and his writing team used irony and sarcasm like a stake, and the show – hell, the genre – they created as a result has made the world a richer place.

Buffy had the balls to make the supernatural seem natural. Before this show, for example, nobody had pointed out (at least on primetime TV) the similarity between someone turning into a snarling werewolf for a few days every month and a woman getting her period. As the show wore on we saw horrible creatures of all shapes and sizes acting like humans – holding down jobs, trying to hustle money, attempting to fit in. This was a theme spin-off show *Angel* eventually ran with to a greater extent, but it was the start of a revolutionary way of looking at fantasy. Nothing was black-and-white in *Buffy's* world: the main villains of season six weren't even supernatural creatures, while some murderous monsters even become good friends (outside of Angel and Spike, there's also Anya). Want



The Facts

Creator

→ Joss Whedon

Aired

→ 1997-2003

Number of seasons

→ 7

Number of episodes

→ 144

another example? While Agents Mulder and Scully were hunting down monsters without giving their feelings a second thought over on Fox, on the (now-defunct) WB Network *Buffy* ended up actually dating a vampire. Nuance? You got it!

What made *Buffy* so easy to identify with was its familiarity. By setting it at a high school, Whedon reminded us all of how lucky we were to escape that hell-hole – because come on, who out of all of us ever enjoyed school? Relishing the irony, he then placed his particular high school on a Hellmouth, making the battle to escape it intact literal. And like a trooper, Buffy rose to the challenge – as did her friends. The ensemble nature of the show was another of its strengths, with Xander's wisecrackery and Willow's nerdiness in particular both essential parts of the mix.

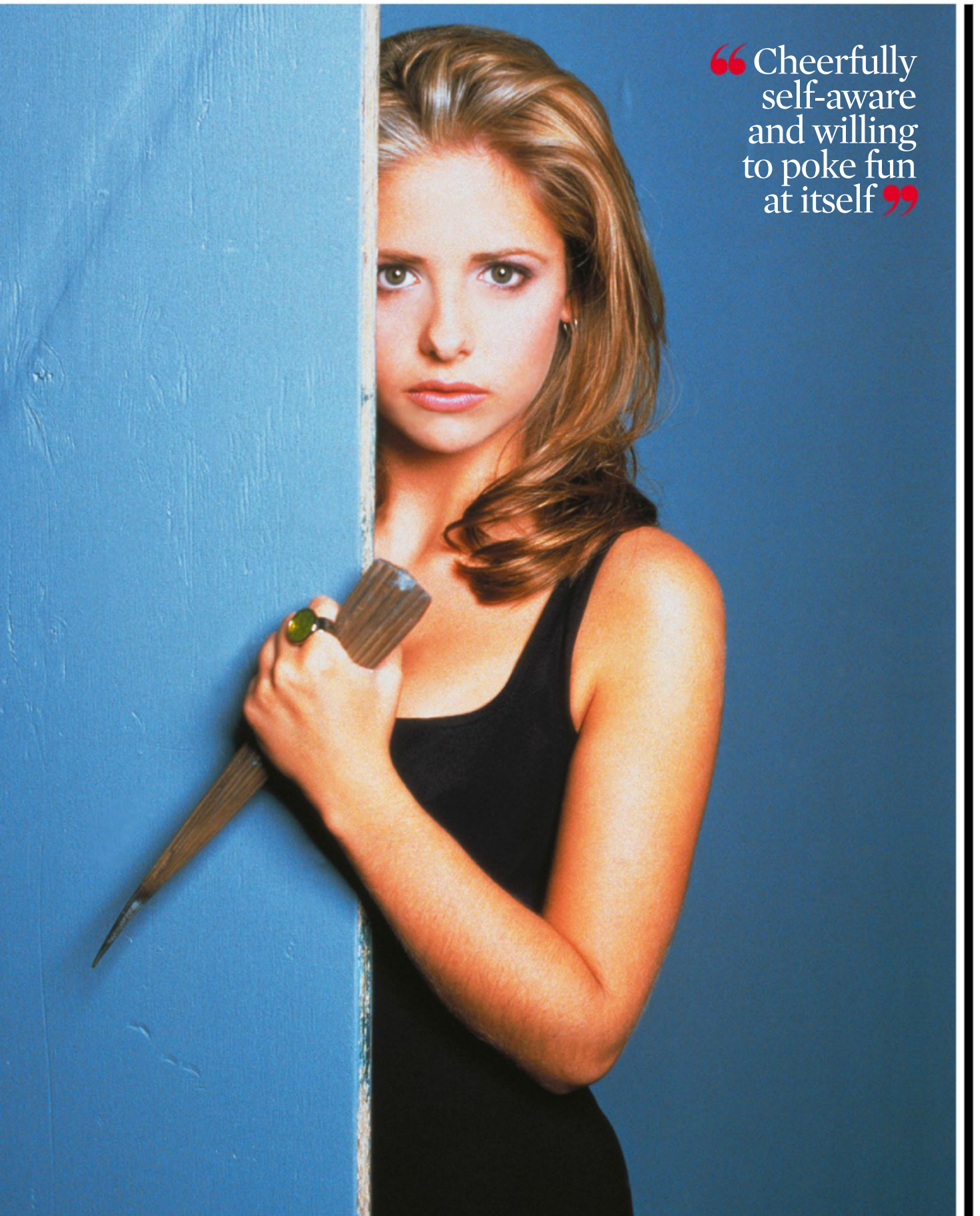
Buffy made such a huge impact that even those who never watched the series know who she is. It was a cult of intelligent viewers enjoying an intelligent show that looked, from the outside, like nothing of the sort: a B-movie brought to life on a weekly basis with delusions of grandeur that were soundly lived up to. *Buffy* set a bar for other shows to live up to... then snapped it in two just for the hell of it. **Jayne Nelson**

THE LEGACY

Thanks to *Buffy* we've had a slew of young women falling in love with vampires, from Elena in *The Vampire Diaries* to Bella in *Twilight*. So thanks for that, Buffster. On the plus side, we've also seen the rise and rise of Joss Whedon. Without *Buffy*, we'd have no *Firefly* (right), *Cabin In The Woods* or two *Avengers* movies – and arguably, the behemoth the Marvel Cinematic Universe has become. The post-*Buffy* generation also has a new way of speaking that's heavy on the irony, wit and geekery ("My bad!"). Just check out shows like *Veronica Mars* (a Whedon favourite) or DC's current crop of TV shows for evidence.



“Cheerfully
self-aware
and willing
to poke fun
at itself”



BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

A TV classic: so say we all!

THE PITCH

The last remaining human survivors of a robot-perpetrated apocalypse are chased across the galaxy as they look for a new home. All this has happened before (and may happen again), but this time disco kitsch, robot dogs and members of the A-Team are kept to an absolute minimum.

WHY IT'S ESSENTIAL

The original *Battlestar Galactica* may not be a classic, but its failings have more to do with the era it was made in than its premise. Humanity on the run from evil machines? What's not to like? Spawned to ride the lucrative wave of post-*Star Wars* space hype, the

Trek take notice, and concede that a show set in outer space could deliver "serious" drama. As *Time* magazine's James Poniewozik so eloquently put it when he named *BSG* the best show of 2005, "Most of you probably think this entry has got to be a joke. The rest of you have actually watched the show."

Battlestar was also prepared to point a magnifying glass at the post-9/11 world in a way no drama based on present-day Earth would have dared. Over the course of its run, *BSG* pulled few punches as it examined politically sensitive themes – the enemy within, civil liberties, religious intolerance – with an even hand. It even ventured into morally ambiguous territory where suicide bombers were the nominal good guys.

“*BSG* pulled few punches as it examined politically sensitive themes”

show's rapidly dated '70s stylings and one-dimensionally wholesome characters didn't sit well with themes of mass genocide. And with most of the effects budget splurged on the first half-dozen episodes, it lacked the firepower to sustain the drama through its single season.

The remake was different. Masterminded by *Star Trek* veteran Ronald D Moore and future *Bionic Woman* rebooter David Eick (let's not talk about that one), *Battlestar 2.0* was born of a more cynical time – and, crucially, coincided with a golden age of American TV, when the likes of HBO had made long-running, complex arc plots fashionable. *Battlestar* made highbrow critics who'd traditionally have turned their noses up at *Star*

But *Battlestar* never drew a line between heroes and villains. Every one of its characters (and there were a hell of a lot of them) had their strengths and weaknesses. They made mistakes just as often as they saved the day, and the humans were frequently as much their own enemy as the Cylons.

Even the Cylons themselves existed in a shades-of-grey world. No longer simple "toasters", their new humanoid forms had just as many existential issues as their prey. Some of them even evolved into sympathetic (and likeable) characters.

Most importantly, *Battlestar*'s protagonists were believable. With the residents of the 12 colonies attired in contemporary Earth



Some games of musical statues are easier than others.

The Facts

Creators

→ Glen A Larson (original series), Ronald D Moore, David Eick

Aired

→ 2003-2009

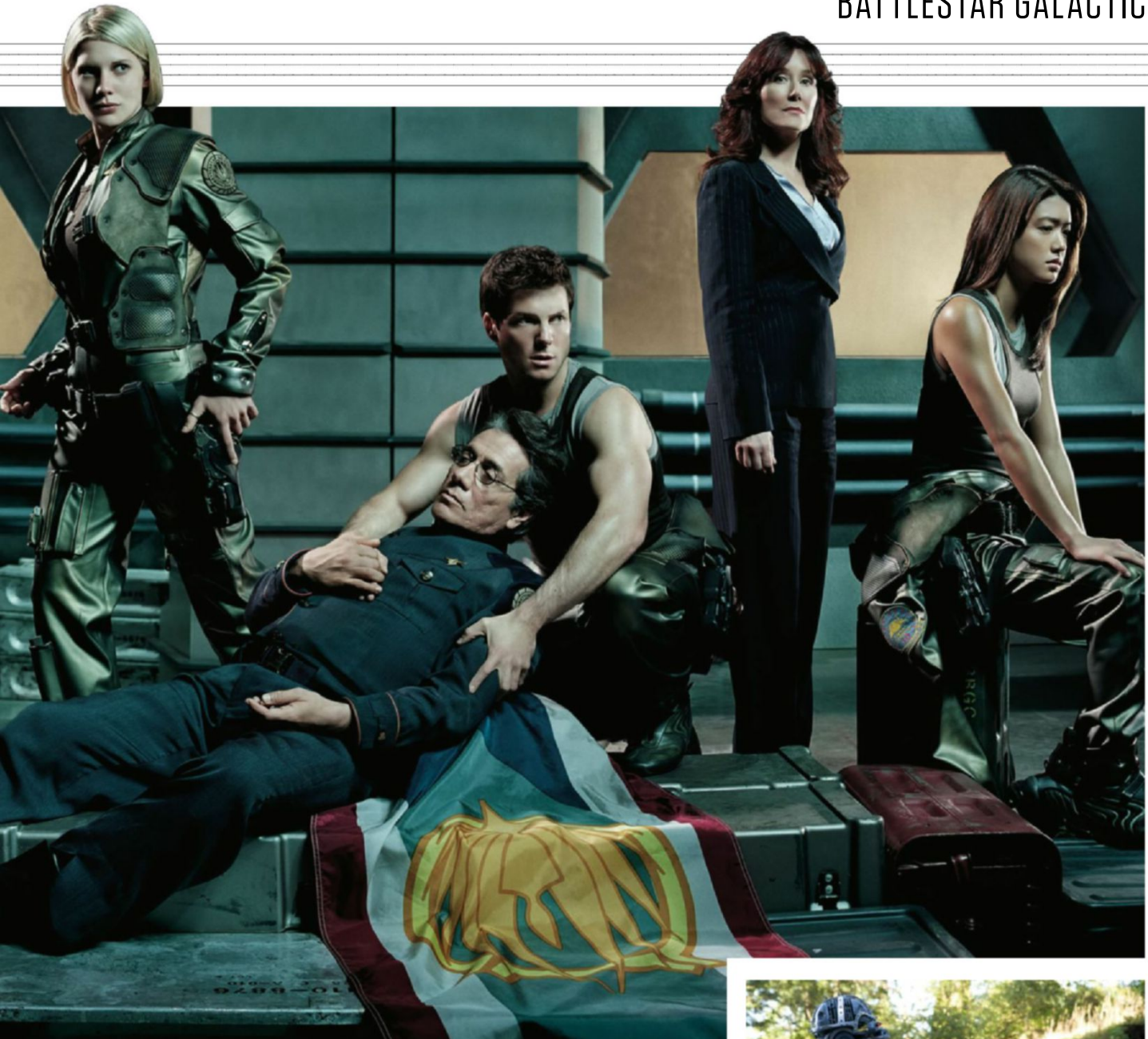
Number of seasons

→ 4

Number of episodes

→ 77 (including miniseries and two TV movies)





clobber and given Earth names (original series monikers such as Starbuck, Apollo and Boomer were retained as pilots' call signs), they never felt alien. Indeed, aside from a penchant for the word "frak", they even talked like us. Being light years from Earth was more or less inconsequential, as *Battlestar* wasn't really about being in space – it was a character-based drama that just happened to be set among the stars, with the crew just as likely to face problems with food shortages and terminal illness as they were interplanetary dogfights.

That's not to say that the sci-fi stuff was an afterthought. From the Colonial Vipers to the Cylon Centurions, the reboot took the designs of the original series and updated them for the 21st century. It was subtle refinement, akin to the way the new Mini took the best

bits of a design classic and made them feel fresh and new. The tech, meanwhile, was futuristic without being implausible. No lasers here, just bullets and nukes – the biggest stretch was the (dramatically necessary) FTL "jump" drives.

Like all the best TV shows, *Battlestar* knew it had to evolve to maintain the drama. So while later seasons eventually lost the urgency of the early non-stop cat-and-mouse, they expanded the series' mythology, upped the spirituality and focused more on the quest to find Earth. Some of the show's edge was lost as the third season progressed, but it did at least get to end on its own terms. The optimistic conclusion may have divided the faithful, but after four seasons of pretty much non-stop misery, we sure as hell deserved some release. **Richard Edwards**



THE LEGACY

What, aside from the fact the Colonials spawned the entire human race? Along with *The Wire* and *The Sopranos*, *Battlestar* was at the forefront of the '00s vanguard of quality telly, paving the way for our current Netflix-led binge-viewing habits. It also spawned its own shortlived prequel series, *Caprica* (above). Ironically, though, *Battlestar* may have hindered space opera on TV as much as it helped. It never bagged massive ratings and not long after its conclusion we found ourselves in the unfortunate position of having no space-based shows on TV – a situation that's only recently been remedied with the likes of *Killjoys*, *Dark Matter*, *The Expanse* and the upcoming *Star Trek: Discovery*.



THE WALKING DEAD

It's the end of the world as we know it...

THE PITCH

Too-nice-for-his-own good sheriff's deputy Rick Grimes is struck down by a criminal's bullet and awakes in a world overrun by zombies. He grows a spine, loses his wife and best friend, and leads his son and a revolving-door group of survivors through a harrowing post-apocalyptic landscape.

WHY IT'S ESSENTIAL

The Walking Dead has enjoyed a success that's not only unprecedented but, a decade ago, was inconceivable. For when it debuted in the autumn of 2010, there had never been a mainstream

horror drama serial that was a certifiable hit on American television, let alone one that packed the same level of viscera as most contemporary horror cinema. The fact that *The Walking Dead* focused on zombies, often the bloodiest of genre subjects, suggested at most a brief run. But from its pilot's opening scene, in which a just-revived Rick Grimes (Andrew Lincoln) is forced to shoot a little zombie girl in the head, *The Walking Dead* – based on writer Robert Kirkman's hit ongoing monthly comic book – has refused to compromise its bleak vision. It's a vision informed in part by 9/11, in which a sudden unexpected force

The Facts

Creators

→ Robert Kirkman, Tony Moore, Charlie Adlard (original comic), Frank Darabont

Aired

→ 2010-present

Number of seasons

→ 7 (to date)

Number of episodes

→ 91 (up to season 7 midseason finale)

has decimated civilisation, and one that eerily anticipated the Occupy Movement, in which a disenfranchised class so outnumbers the privileged that its dominance appears only natural.

First season showrunner Frank Darabont, director of *The Shawshank Redemption*, brought his love of examining the human psyche under pressure – most evident in his Stephen King adaptation *The Mist* – and his interest, shared with King, in lean, sweaty tales of everyman protagonists on all-too-terrifying road trips to Kirkman's "zombie movie that never ends". Although Darabont was let go after season one, executive producer Glen Mazzara picked up the reins in season two when Rick and his friends found refuge at the farm of Hershel Greene (Scott Wilson), the first in a series of temporary homes for the heroes. The show's characterisations and momentum improved steadily throughout

Not your usual
Sunday evening fare.



THE LEGACY

After almost one hundred episodes, in which dozens of characters have been introduced and killed off, it's interesting to note the increase in horror and supernatural-themed programming on television, from *American Horror Story* (left) to *Hannibal* to *Sleepy Hollow* to *iZombie*, to Kirkman's own *Outcast* and TWD spinoff show *Fear The Walking Dead*. Meanwhile, it's hard not to view other post-apocalyptic sagas of bands on the run, like *Falling Skies*, *The Last Ship*, *The 100*, *12 Monkeys* and *The Strain* through the lens of *The Walking Dead*'s success.



his talent could not be confined to one medium. The other behind-the-scenes pillar is Greg Nicotero, the zombie make-up effects wizard who began his career on Romero's *Day Of The Dead*, and whose contributions to *The Walking Dead* proved so significant he was quickly promoted to director and executive producer.

It's worth comparing *The Walking Dead*'s cast to those of other American ensemble genre

land of outlaws and rednecks – and rarer still for genre TV to do so. But Kirkman himself is a Southerner, and the fact that the show adheres so closely to his comic's environment speaks volumes about the clarity of its vision.

Not that *The Walking Dead* is entirely devoid of rednecks. Daryl Dixon (Norman Reedus), arguably its most popular character, initially possessed many less-than-savoury traits. But Dixon evolved into one

“It refuses to compromise its bleak vision”

shows. Take *Lost*, for example – another huge hit about a group of fiercely determined survivors. Like the original *Star Trek*, it featured just one character (Sawyer) from the American South. *The Walking Dead*, however, is decidedly Southern in almost every respect. Rick, his partner/rival Shane (Jon Bernthal), Hershel and the Governor all possess deep Southern accents of the kind rarely heard on TV. It's rare for a US show to identify itself with this region – often stereotypically portrayed as a

of the series' most three-dimensional characters, and some of *The Walking Dead*'s most memorable moments involve this deceptively crude crossbowman's growth in a perpetual, proverbial valley of death. Dixon also serves as the perfect example of the show's concern with duality, offering tenderness and brutality in equal measure, and suggesting that both are necessary in order to reclaim what's left of the human soul in the wake of the unthinkable.

Joseph McCabe

seasons three and four, which saw the band living in a fortified prison, until they were attacked and driven out by their arch-nemesis, the Governor (David Morrissey), who remains the show's best villain. Mazzara was succeeded as showrunner by Scott Gimple, who guided *The Walking Dead* through its finest era in the second half of season four, in which the group was splintered and on the run. Entire episodes focused on individual protagonists, hugely enriching a number of characters.

Darabont, Mazzara and Gimple have all been aided as showrunner by their executive producers Gale Anne Hurd (a genre legend for producing *Aliens* and co-writing/producing *The Terminator*) and Kirkman himself, whose scripts – along with his *Walking Dead* spin-off novel *The Rise Of The Governor* – have proven



The cliffhanger that set
half the internet on fire.



A show that is never short of bloody violence.



THE LEGACY

With the show still on air, it's hard to know what its legacy will be – although there have already been imitators, such as MTV's perky (and not very good) *The Shannara Chronicles*, adapted from Terry Brooks's novels, or Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* (above). Plus there's Dave's recent sitcom, *Zapped*. But other fantasy is being given a dusting off, it seems: NBC will air *Emerald City*, a dark version of *The Wizard Of Oz*, in January, and the BBC is ploughing forward with a series based on *His Dark Materials* – would they have done that without *Thrones*, given how the film flopped? And you could also argue that *Westworld* is *Game Of Thrones* in a theme park...

GAME OF THRONES

Wild Wild Westeros

THE PITCH

Kingdoms across a sprawling world face war and destruction, not to mention a near-endless winter. Each of the seven kingdoms – from the Starks in the north to the Lannisters of the Westernlands – must deal with double-crossings, plots, murders and even bloody enormous dragons. We follow a selection of characters, most of whom aren't clearly "good" or "evil", as they try to survive, adapt and manoeuvre themselves into power. Oh, and did we mention the zombie horde about to overrun them all...?

WHY IT'S ESSENTIAL

What makes *Game Of Thrones* so special can be summed up in one word: quality. That's why it's one of the biggest shows in the world today, all thanks to a groundbreaking leap of faith by HBO into a realm that has never been convincingly ported from book to television screen before

(we've seen Middle-earth, of course, but never as a weekly series). If HBO had decided to make the show on a budget; if they'd scrimped on its cast, music, sets, CGI, design, locations, its ambition, *Game Of Thrones* would have died a death as tragic as... well, name your character. That's the other thing this show doesn't skimp on: the emotional resonance that comes from making us love someone and then lose them, usually in a horrific way.

But instead HBO threw \$6 million at each episode. It knew that while it was a channel known mostly for drama (*The Sopranos*, *The Wire*), if it treated the fantasy world created in George RR Martin's bestselling book series with the same seriousness and sense of realism, audiences would respond. And that's exactly what they did. Quality is quality, after all.

This may be fantasy, but we can still relate to the lives of Ned Stark and his family: noble, more-or-less good

The Facts

Creators

→ George RR Martin (novels), David Benioff, DB Weiss

Aired

→ 2011-present

Number of seasons

→ 6 (to date)

Number of episodes

60 (to date)

folk who do their best. We can empathise with Daenerys as she's married off to a savage stranger, then discovers she has superpowers that leave her with three pet dragons (jealous! Er, of the dragons, not the first bit). We can marvel at the level of intrigue displayed by the calculating Lannisters; gawp at the giants who live with the Wildlings in the North; wish that we, too, could have faithful dire wolves padding at our heels.

The show has made its name by using copious amounts of sex and violence – not all of it to the delight of viewers – but, by doing so, it's made people talk. Its most harrowing events have become part of our lexicon for "shocking": the Red Wedding; a head-crushing fight; last season's *astonishing* "Battle Of The Bastards". *Game Of Thrones* is exactly what people mean by "event television" – and we still have two seasons to go. Life is good. Well, unless you live in Westeros. **Jayne Nelson**



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SFX
PRESENTS

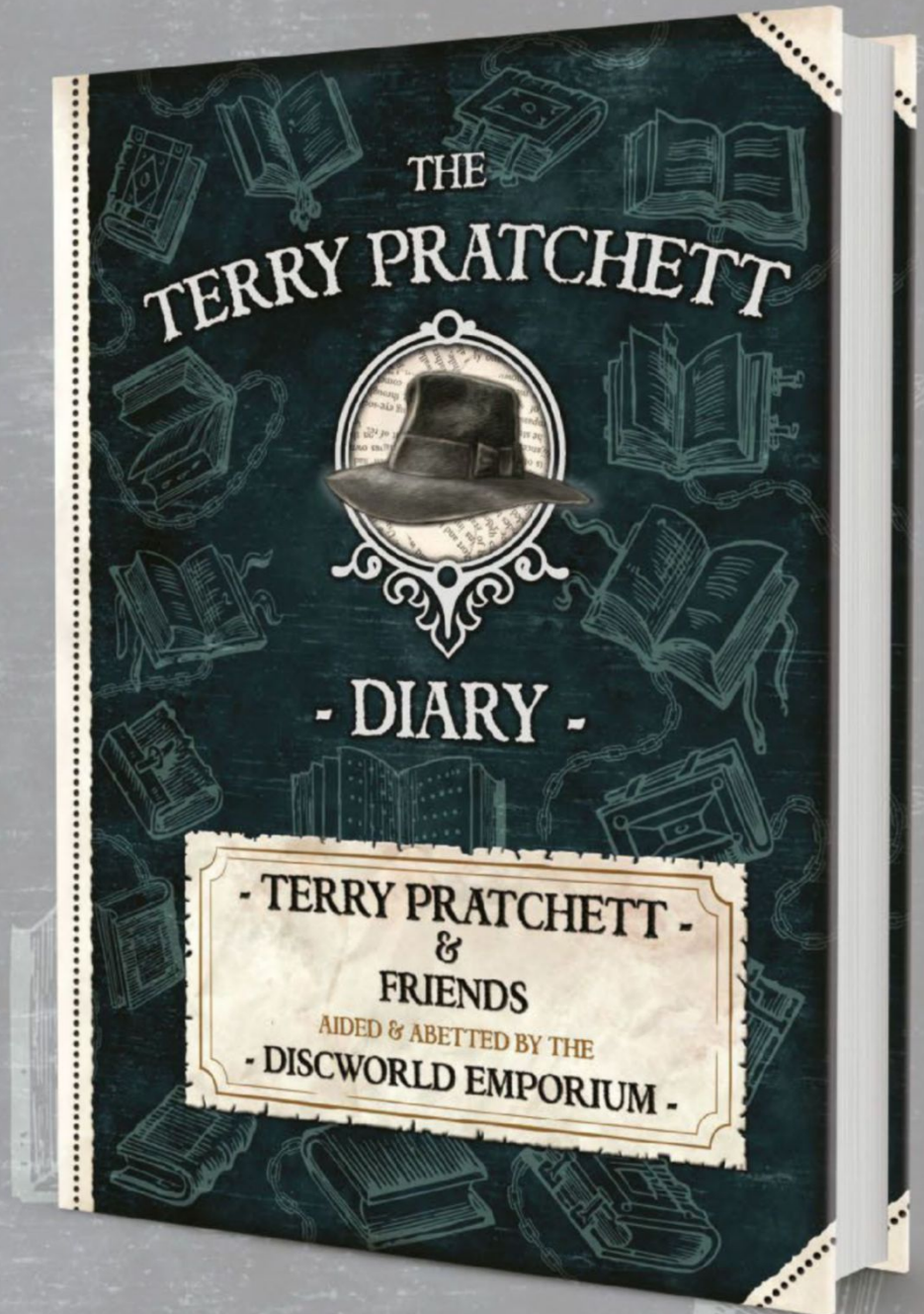
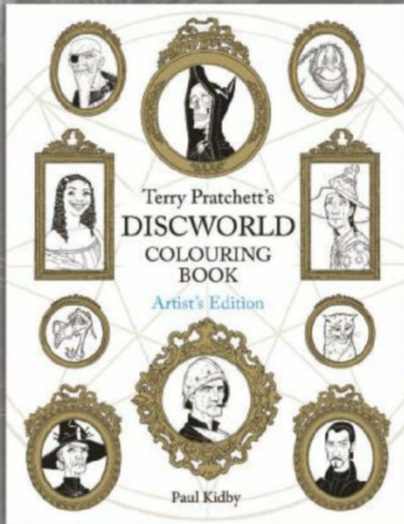
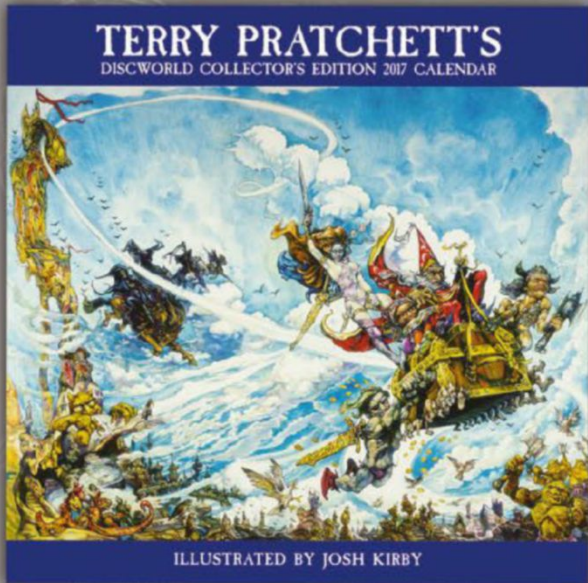
ESSENTIAL SCI-FI

TV

THE MOST IMPORTANT SHOWS OF ALL TIME

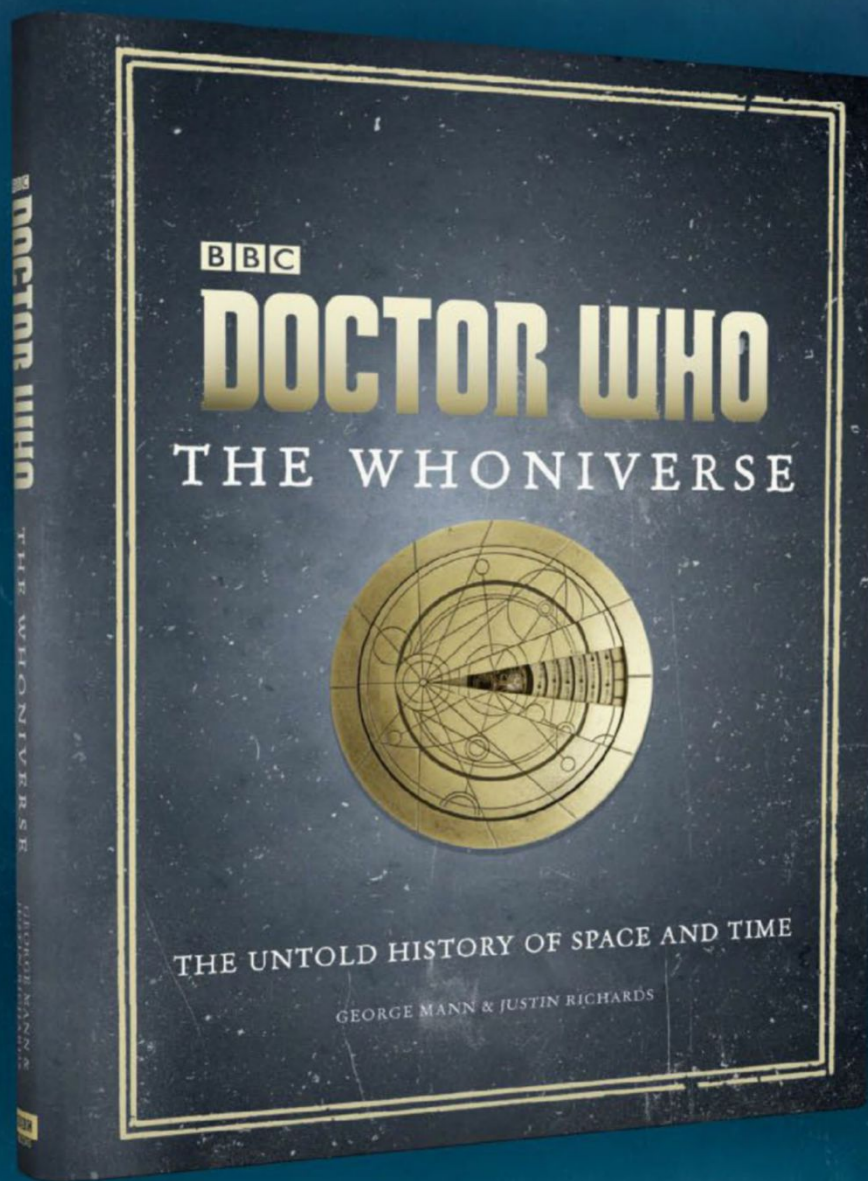
Future

“People think that stories are shaped by people. In fact, it’s the other way around.” Terry Pratchett, *Witches Abroad*



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THE WHONIVERSE

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